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THE IMPACT OF VISUAL AIDS ON MEMORY IN PREACHING

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MARCH 2005

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THE IMPACT OF VISUAL AIDS ON MEMORY IN PREACHING

A MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
CONCORDIA SEMINARY IN THE CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

CURTIS L. DETERDING

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CONTENTS

TITLE	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
ABSTRACT	vi

Chapter	Page
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1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT: THE IMPACT OF VISUAL AIDS ON MEMORY IN PREACHING	1
2. THE SCRIPTURES AND REMEMBERING	6
Basic Biblical Definition	
Law and Gospel Framework	
Relation to Faith	
Participation: The Key to Biblical Remembering	
Lutheran Theology and Remembering	
Visual Aids in Worship Enhance Memory	
3. THE SENSE OF SIGHT AND RETENTION: A HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL STUDY	27
Historical Review	
Contemporary Writers	
Application for the Church	
4. THE DESIGN OF THE VISUAL AID PROJECT	38
The Problem and Goal of the Project	
The Development of the Project	
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	49
Analyzing and Interpreting the Evaluations	
What Does This Mean?	
Visual Aids Serve the Gospel	
6. GUIDELINES AND CONCLUSIONS	66
Set of Guidelines for Using Visual Aids in Preaching	
Overall Analysis and Impact of the Study	

Appendixes

1. Sermons Preached for the Project	80
2. Evaluations of Project Sermons	107

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 132

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Remembered the Bible Text Used for the Sermon	50
2. Words or Phrases Remembered From the Bible Texts	52
3. Remembered the Major Thought About the Sermon	54
4. Remembered That a Visual Aid was Used During the Sermon	56
5. Remembered the Visual Aid Used During the Sermon	58
6. Remembered the Connection Between the Visual Aid and Sermon Text. . . .	59

ABSTRACT

Are hearers able to better retain what they have heard preached if visual aids are used?

This is the central question answered by this thesis. A primary presupposition of this project is that when we involve the use of sight during the sermon event, our ability to remember what was said increases. In this study, the theoretical and theological analysis of remembering and memory are discussed in connection with the use of visuals for retention. Those who participated in the project as hearers were asked to evaluate some sermons that used visual aids and some that did not. Based on the answers given some conclusions can be drawn to demonstrate that the use of visual aids can have a significant impact on the memory of the hearers.

CHAPTER 1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT: THE IMPACT OF VISUAL AIDS ON MEMORY IN PREACHING

A preacher wants to help his hearers retain what they have heard of God's Word. After all, one of the goals of the sermon is to have your hearers carry the message back into their daily lives invigorated to live out what they have heard. To attain this goal, people need to remember the main purpose and/or central thought of the sermon into the rest of the week or longer.

When considering the sermons I remember the most, many of them used visual aids or painted a clear visual picture in my mind. After using visual aids in my own sermons, I discovered that some of my members would tell me weeks, months and sometimes even years later about that visual aid. It was still lodged in their memory.

Pursuing the homiletics track in the Doctor of Ministry program at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, I became interested in sermon retention. Influenced by several courses and the assigned readings, I became convinced that those who listened to my sermons could better retain the message if more of their senses were called upon to participate in the event. In the past, my personal observation had shown that by implementing more of my hearers' senses in the homiletical event the better they were able to retain what I was saying.

However, one significant impediment for hearers is limited retention. "Research indicates that people retain only about 10 percent of what they learn through verbal and written communication."¹ Yet a pastor puts in many hours of work on preparing the sermon. He

¹Thom and Joani Schultz, *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 1993), 145.

believes that the message is vitally important for his hearers to carry with them. Thus he also needs to help them remember what he has preached.

Many sermons, where the main goal or central thought is more easily remembered, involve the use of one or more senses besides hearing. A second sense that is used when listening to a sermon is that of sight. Most often, unless the preacher has bored them to sleep, his hearers are using their eyes to watch as he delivers his sermon. Too often, preachers do not take more advantage of this sense of sight to help make the Gospel memorable in order to reach the sermon's goal. This project seeks to help the preacher enhance and improve his preaching so that his hearers might remember the proclamation and then, by the Spirit's power, live accordingly.

The primary purpose of this project will be to research the use of sight, specifically through visual aids, as an effective way to assist the preacher in improving the participation of his hearers and therefore the retention of the message. As mentioned earlier, there are still sermons and sermon texts that I can recall as the result of the use of a visual aid. For example, I remember a sermon that I heard and saw as a teenager based on the account of Thomas doubting that Jesus was alive and resurrected from the dead. The preacher told us he had something in his pocket that no one had ever seen before. He went on to describe how difficult it is to believe in something we have never seen. The connection to Thomas was obvious, he had not seen Jesus and just couldn't believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Adding to the mysterious identity of the visual aid in his pocket, the preacher went on to say that he hadn't even seen what he himself put in his pocket. I did not recall the exact book and verses where these words were recorded, but I did remember the Bible story and the focus of the message to "stop doubting and believe." I believe the mystery and anticipation I was sensing, wondering if what the preacher was saying was true, was very connected to the feelings Thomas must have been going through as he wondered about what he had heard. Finally, the preacher revealed his visual aid. It was a

peanut. No matter how hard it was to believe what he was saying, everything he had told us was absolutely true. The preacher opened the shell of the peanut and revealed to us the actual peanut itself which neither he nor anyone else in the whole world had ever seen before. Oh, how those words of Jesus hit home, “because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”² Even my own sermons I remember best are the ones that utilized one or more of the senses besides the sense of hearing.

This paper will focus on the sense of sight to help make the Gospel of the sermon memorable for a longer period of time. There are a variety of ways to utilize this sense, such as live drama, puppet shows, slides and filmstrip, video clips and visual aids. But not all appeals to this sense rely on actual objects, people or pictures. Much visual imagery can be created by language in the mind’s eye. Some pastors use language to paint a picture or create a video in the imagination of his hearers. Even though the eyes are not actually viewing the image or images, the mind is still creating the visual in its own unique fashion, as if the hearer were watching the action. For example, if I were to ask you to picture yourself on a yacht, you might have pictured something the size and look of a cabin cruiser, sailing on a blue ocean with a cool breeze blowing through your hair. But this is not what is being studied in this project. However helpful picturesque language is, the visual aids discussed here will be mostly on objects that can be held in or shown from the pulpit or preaching area. So the term visual/visual aids will refer to actual objects that can be literally seen by the hearers.

Thus, the questions this paper seeks to answer are: What theological justification is there for using visual aids during the sermon? When are visual aids more effective in increasing the retention of the message by the hearer? When and how are visual aids helpful? When can they

²Jn 20:29 NIV.

be distracting? How often should pastors consider using them? What are the better ways to use visuals in a sermon?

The following chapters will seek to provide answers to these questions. The first step will be to demonstrate theologically the value of memory and retention. Research will reveal that the sense of sight was used throughout Scripture for the purpose of helping God's people to remember His justice and His mercy. Therefore, the use of visual aids is a valid and biblical way of bringing God's plan of salvation into the lives of their hearers.

Another objective of this study will be to show recent research on memory and the impact the sense of sight plays in the memory process. "Memory systems" were used as early as the fourth century B.C. by Greek orators such as Simonides. Modern day experts in the science and study of memory, along with those who have written books in recent years on how to improve your memory, will give us a theoretical foundation of the relationship between memory and visual aids.

This study will then move from historical research on memory and remembrance to the development of the project which was carried out to demonstrate the usefulness of visual aids in the sermon. Three pastors and congregations were asked to participate in this project. Each pastor was assigned to preach three sermons to their hearers attending two different services over a weekend. One week they were asked to preach using a visual aid during one service while only describing the visual at the other service. On another week, they were to preach the same way only switch the use of the visual aid between the services. For their third sermon they were to use the visual aid for both services.

Each pastor was asked to select two hearers from each group to evaluate the sermon. Each sermon was evaluated approximately six days later so that the next week's sermon would not interfere with their ability to remember what was visually done or said. The evaluation form

asked if they remembered the visual aid that was used during the sermon, the sermon text, some of the words from the text that had been connected to that visual, and other significant points about the sermon. They were also asked to describe what was the central theme of this sermon.

The project was limited to twelve total evaluations of three separate sermons preached at three separate congregations. Three sermons were set as the project's limit to keep from being overwhelmed in data. The project was conducted over a four month period. All of the time limits were set to keep the project manageable.

Finally, the final section of this study will not only give an overview of the project, but will also analyze the data provided by the hearers on their evaluations. The data will be used to answer the practical questions put forth at the beginning of this chapter. Those questions are as follows: When are visual aids more effective in increasing the retention of the message by the hearer? When can they be distracting? How often should pastors consider using them? What are the better ways to use visuals in a sermon? Also provided in this section are some guidelines for preachers to review as they undertake the use of visual aids in their own sermon delivery.

The use of visual aids has become a part of my preaching. The Doctor of Ministry classes have certainly stimulated my interest in how to better use these visual aids. This project hopes to help other preachers make use of this homiletical device in their own preaching. To do that, we first turn to God's Word to develop a theology of remembering that identifies the importance of stimulating the visual sense for the retention of God's message of salvation in His Word.

CHAPTER 2

THE SCRIPTURES AND REMEMBERING

Introduction

In the Bible, we discover how God uses the human senses to help us to retain in our hearts and minds what He has told us. The Scriptures show us that participation in such actions as worship, the sacraments, and His Word are key to remembering the grace and blessings of God because human memory is connected to a participatory event. Remembering involves the active use of our senses. Johanes Pedersen, quoted in Brevard Child's book, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, suggests that "the act of remembering seems closely linked with action of some kind,"¹ and, of course, action involves the use of our senses. To better understand the relationship between participation, our senses and memory, we begin with a review of the Biblical words for remembering.

Basic Biblical Definition

The word in the Old Testament for remember is זָכַר. Its basic meaning is "to recall something which is already known, to keep in mind."² However, when God instructed His people to recall or remember a past event in their history, He was not calling for just any remembering. He was directing them to remember His great acts of mercy and salvation. For example, God's instruction to the Israelites in Exodus 12:14, "... 'this is a day you are to

¹Brevard Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London, England: SCM Press LTD, 1962), 18.

²*Ibid.*, 11.

remember,”³ was referring to the Day of Passover, followed by a list of words and actions they were to repeat on an annual basis. “They (the Israelites) were called upon to re-enact this feast to remember how God had saved them from the plague of death and delivered them from the hands of their enemies.”⁴

To remind the people of God’s will, the Israelites wore phylacteries, small tubular adornments attached to headbands and armbands.⁵ Inside the phylacteries were written the Ten Commandments on small pieces of parchment to assist them in remembering God’s rules for a holy and pure relationship with him. God’s Old Testament people used them to recall or keep in mind His desire to be their God and for them to be His people.

The noun זָכָר (“memorial sign”) in the Old Testament plays a significant role in connecting the saving acts and words of promise from God to the memory of His people.⁶ Among these “memorial signs” were visual objects such as altar coverings, onyx stones, booty, cereal offering, a breast piece, trumpets, which were used during the Passover Feast. The purpose of these memorials was to guarantee that the covenant relationship God had with His people would not be forgotten. They helped the people remember their eternal relationship with their Creator.

The memorials as cultic objects serve to insure Israel’s relation to God’s order by reminding both God and Israel. Yahweh is reminded of his purpose with Israel and his memory is equivalent to his action. Israel is reminded of the eternal order and she again relates herself to it by cultic participation in the events which mediated the order.⁷

³Ex 12:14 NIV.

⁴Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, A-□ (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 349.

⁵Duet. 6:8 NIV.

⁶Ex. 12:14, 13:9 Num. 17:5, Job 13:12, Isa. 57:8 NIV.

⁷Ibid., 68.

According to Gerhard Kittel, the New Testament Greek word, μνησκειν, means “to remember,” or “to be mindful of.”⁸ But it was not merely remembering the past. Nils Dahl writes:

What had happened was not simply an event in the past; it was also a present reality in the church which remembered her Lord and proclaimed his death until he might come... “Strong objection have been raised against considering the gospels as ‘memoirs,’ ‘recollections,’ and it has been made clear that they do not pretend to be retrospective historical accounts, but precisely ‘gospel,’ preaching, witness of faith...the gospels did not intend to be accounts of past facts, but a prolongation of revelation where what was recounted becomes present reality by the very fact of preaching and reading.”⁹

When the word “remember” is used in the New Testament it is usually connected to remembering God’s future promises and the promises of the prophets fulfilled through His Son as a present reality. What God does for His people in Jesus is stressed as most important for Christians to hold in their memories. Paul writes,

Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth...(were) at that time separate from Christ...without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.¹⁰

In the New Testament the word ἀνάμνησις almost always signifies to recall something, a “remembrance” or “recollection.” This recollection is by word or deed, “An action whereby the object is re-presented in memory.”¹¹ For example, in I Corinthians 11:24, Jesus says, “This is my body; which is for you; do this in *remembrance* of me,” and “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in *remembrance* of me.” He is asking his disciples to perform an action that will recall what He has done for them, a remembrance. Christians are to re-enact the whole action of the Lord’s Supper, in “recollection of Jesus, and this not merely in

⁸Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, Λ-Ν(Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 675.

⁹Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 27.

¹⁰Eph 2:11a-13 NIV.

¹¹Kittel, 349.

such sort that they simply remember, but rather, in accordance with the active sense...in such a way that they actively fulfill the '*remembrance*.'"¹² The repetition of the actual event brings to our memory the body given and the blood shed by Jesus for the forgiveness of sins each time we re-enact this event. This is how we "do" this in "*remembrance*" of Him.

Law and Gospel Framework

Moving from the basic definition of memory in Scripture to the purpose of memory, we discover how both God's memory and human memory are involved, and involved in a law and Gospel framework. Dahl demonstrates that Scripture shows there is both a remembering done by God and a remembering done among those who believe in Him.

God's remembering is thus an efficacious and creative event. Above all, God remembers His covenant which He made with the fathers Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He binds Himself afresh to the grace promised therein...A basic element in OT piety is that man remembers the past acts of God...God's remembering does not always bring grace and mercy; God can also remember the wicked acts...Every event on earth has its 'effect' on God. His remembrance is concealed in His acts of grace and judgment.¹³

From the law perspective God remembers as Judge and tells us to remember how we have broken our covenant relationship with Him due to our sinful nature. Brevard Childs observes: "The present rupture in the relationship of Yahweh with His people stems from Israel's failure to understand the saving acts."¹⁴ By nature our thoughts, words and deeds are full of evil and wickedness. When God remembers transgressions, His punishment and wrath are not far behind.¹⁵ However, God does not desire to remember our sins that lead to eternal suffering and death. For the person who has been brought to their knees by the law and has turned to God in repentance pleading for His mercy, we find a God of grace, hope and love. He remembers our

¹²Ibid.

¹³Dahl, 18.

¹⁴Childs, 56.

¹⁵Ex. 32:34b NIV.

sin no more.¹⁶ Instead, God remembers and desires us to remember the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus remembers and trusts in God's promised blessings of deliverance, forgiveness, salvation, and life eternal in this new covenant relationship. These divine blessings come to us only through the work of His Spirit. In other words, "through the Spirit's work, man remembers God's remembrance of him."¹⁷ On the other hand, "forgetting to remember God's act of deliverance of Israel was synonymous with apostasy or spiritual adultery."¹⁸ Not remembering leaves us in a broken relationship and brings God's wrath and condemnation. Remembering brings God's mercy and salvation.

This law and Gospel remembering renews us in our understanding of God's will and blessing in our lives. When we remember God's law, we remember His wrath, judgment and condemnation because of our sin. We are reminded that the consequences of our sin are trial, suffering and death. The guilt and shame we feel brings us to repentance. Once the Spirit leads us to repentance, He then carries us by faith to remember the Gospel promises.

In John's gospel, we are told that the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you."¹⁹ The work of the Holy Spirit is to call, gather and enlighten, to help us to recall and remember the saving work of Jesus that has so changed our lives. When we hear and experience the Gospel, the Spirit is at work strengthening our faith by helping us remember our new relationship with God. Through faith we remember the wonderful blessings of God's mercy: forgiveness and new life here and forever which come to us through the redemptive work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

¹⁶Jer. 31:34 NIV.

¹⁷G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 65.

¹⁸Ibid., 68.

¹⁹John 14:26 NIV.

Relationship to Faith

Because remembering occurs in a Law and Gospel framework, it is intimately related to faith. Mark Steiner makes the claim that, “Remembrance can also carry with it the aspect of action. This (action) is implied when ‘remembrance’ is employed to enjoin the observance of Passover in Exodus 20.”²⁰ For Steiner, “remembrance” is almost synonymous with “deliverance.” Of course, to remember merely in the head does not mean you agree or believe this to be true for yourself in the heart. Therefore, deliverance is only realized when connected to faith. Remembrance is more than just gathering knowledge, it is believing in what you remember, clinging to future promises of deliverance. God delivers, but our faith which remembers what God has done, holds to that deliverance. Remembrance is not just recalling the past historical fact of Christ’s death through Word and sacraments, but recalling that past event through the eyes of faith.

Behind the scriptural use of the word “remembrance” is the covenantal significance of the relationship between God and humankind. The old and new covenantal remembrance events instituted by God for His people are the Passover Meal and the Lord’s Meal. Steiner asserts:

Depending on context, God or man might be the subject of (scriptural) remembrance. If God is the subject, man will be remembered for his salvation or his damnation. If man is the subject, God will be believed or rejected, remembered or forgotten. Most crucial to this study is the frequent use of remembrance within the covenantal framework.²¹

What is remembered happened in the past, but remembering God’s past work of deliverance through faith makes that past a present reality. This remembrance and faith allow for an intimate encounter with the great acts of redemption. Steiner writes: “The act of remembrance is not a simple inner reflection, but involves an action, an encounter with historical

²⁰Mark G. Steiner, “The Covenantal Significance of Remembrance as It is Used in Luke 22:19” (S.T.M. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1988), 39.

²¹Ibid., 99.

events.”²² When we participate in sacramental events through faith, we are participating in the present in events that connect us in our memory with the saving acts of the past.

Participation: The Key to Biblical Remembering

Having examined the basic definitions, its law and gospel framework and connection to faith, we turn to memory and participation. The key to Biblical remembering is the gathering of God’s people in accordance with God’s will to honor the Sabbath day. Those gathered are offered an opportunity to participate in worship with fellow believers in the body of Christ. Further, this participation calls upon the use of our senses during the worship service. In actions of praying, kneeling, bowing, singing, praising, eating, drinking, listening, seeing, all of our senses are employed, which in turn impact our memory.

For example, as the Passover was a meal of deliverance and remembrance so too is the Lord’s Supper a meal of deliverance and remembrance, an act of participation, which incorporates all the senses. Our senses experience the meal which in turn etches this activity into our memory. We visibly see the elements, we hear the word connected to the elements, we feel, smell and taste the elements that remind us of Christ’s presence not just in our mouths but in our lives. When Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance” He is connecting all the senses to “do” or participate in this meal so that we experience and remember how our sins have been forgiven and how we have been eternally delivered.

God instructed the Israelites to participate with their senses in festivals and temple rituals so that through these experiences they would increase their memory. God wanted His people to remember a number of divine blessings , and so he had them participate in rituals and festivals for this purpose. He uses objects such as herbs, blood, sacrifices, unleavened bread, offerings, and so forth to increase their participation, the full use of their senses to help them remember. As

²²Ibid., 88.

the people increased in their participation, their ability to retain the past increased as well. By using their senses, God accomplished his purpose to increase the memory of His people. He did this through their experience and participation in these remembrance festivals. Dahl observes:

‘Remembrance’ and ‘commemoration’ have then held a central place in early Christian worship, in the preaching to the church, and in thanksgiving and prayer. We also find a trace in the New Testament of the celebration of Sunday as the Lord’s Day in memory of his resurrection.²³

Every time we come together for true worship, the act is one of remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians we are reminded that our participation in the Lord’s Supper is another way of remember the saving work of Christ: “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”²⁴ Paul, in attempting to invoke the reader or hearer’s memory, asks questions about what our participation in the Lord’s meal means. Earlier he writes, “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?”²⁵ Participation invokes memory.

Another way we participate in worship is through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Here we see the water. Water reminds us of drowning our sinful nature and of washing our sins away, cleansing us from the filth of our sin to make us pure and holy. Dahl comments:

Baptism was administered in the name of Jesus Christ. The gospel was the message concerning him. Basically, to recall the gospel and baptism is to evoke the memory of Jesus as Savior and Lord. 2 Timothy says it very clearly: ‘Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel.’ (2 Tim. 2:8). To ‘remember Jesus Christ’ does not mean to preserve in memory an image of him but to let this memory form our thoughts and actions.²⁶

²³Dahl, 21.

²⁴I Cor 11:26 NIV.

²⁵I Cor 10:16-17 NIV.

²⁶Dahl, 20.

When people request private baptism, I do all I can to encourage them to have the baptism performed in the sight of the worshiping community. Through this visual, those who are looking on can be reminded of their own baptism. Luther reminds us in his writings how important it is to remember our baptism daily. He wants us to remember not only the building, the pastor, the water, the circumstances surrounding our baptism, but especially the blessing and the gifts that Word and water bring.

The Word and Sacraments in worship makes full use of our senses, of which the visual is integral. To participate with the great acts of redemption as a community gathered in the name of Christ is the heart of worship. To participate in these great acts is remembrance for the people of God. When the people of God participate in worship and in life with the great and saving acts of the past, this experience is actually linking them to the future because it is all one in God's purpose or plan. Accordingly, increased participation is beneficial, even essential for remembrance, and the visual plays a vital role in the acts of participation.

Lutheran Theology and Remembering

Distinguishing Between Natural and Spiritual Memory: A Key to a Lutheran Understanding of Remembering

As we continue to discover how the use of the visual sense is one key to participation in worship, we now turn to the Lutheran Confessions to find out what is said concerning the subject of memory and remembrance. The major areas of this discussion are with the distinction between the natural and spiritual memory, remembering the acts of Christ, remembering as essential to the spiritual growth of Christians and emphasizing remembrance and the sacraments. As we will see in this study, Lutheran doctrine offers us a foundational understanding of memory and remembrance in connection to our relationship to God.

Before we turn to the Confessions themselves, basic to a Lutheran understanding is distinguishing between remembering in an old, natural, earthly sense and remembering in new, supernaturally-changed, spiritual sense. Paul writes in Colossians 3, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things...you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge in the image of its Creator.”²⁷ Also in Romans 12 we read, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”²⁸ This renewal has come about in the lives of believers because of the work of God, especially the work of the Holy Spirit who uses the means of grace to renew our memory. Anyone regenerated in their mind by the work of the Holy Spirit thinks and remembers in a new way.

Oftentimes, when the writers of the Lutheran Confessions write about remembering or remembrance, they are referring to the regenerated person. This spiritual use of remembering instead of natural remembering is in line with what we saw in the above study of God’s Word. Remembering is key in the life of a believer. The Word and the means of grace are the vehicles through which the Holy Spirit calls, enlightens and sanctifies us into the one true faith. The Spirit uses the means to remind us of the past by which God brings us His grace. Through God’s means of grace, His holy Word and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Meal, we are reminded and renewed in our minds about the great eternal gifts; the forgiveness of sins, salvation, new life here in this world and eternal life.

There would be no spiritual remembering of God’s curses or promises if not for the work of the Holy Spirit. According to Luther we would be no different than a horse or mule if not for the Spirit’s work.

²⁷Col 3:2, 9b-10 NIV.

²⁸Romans 12:2a NIV.

Therefore the Holy Spirit exhorts us in Psalms 32:9 not to become like the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. For to make use of creatures only according to the body, and not through them to direct the heart and the mind toward God, is to perceive them only with the senses, like the horse and the mule. They can see them only as long as they are present. Thus these, too, forget the works of the Lord and do not remember them. To indicate this, the psalm does not say “I will see,” “I will hear,” or “I will feel” thy works, which all rational creatures do, but “I will remember and meditate.”²⁹

The human capacity to remember is a wonderful gift from God. Believers and unbelievers alike can remember what God has done. Even an unbeliever can get a perfect score on a Law/Gospel test. There is a natural ability in our memory to recall certain aspects of God. But sin has destroyed our mind’s ability to profitably remember or know about our redeemed relationship with God. We have a mental block, a blind spot that leaves us spiritually in the dark about where we came from, whose we are, and what is planned for our future because of the saving work of Christ. So the unbeliever who does well on a Law/Gospel test still does not remember God's saving work in a way that benefits his eternal destiny. Using only our intellect, we can know only a God of creation and judgment. However, with the Holy Spirit’s power, we remember a God of mercy and salvation.

Hence, the Holy Spirit is needed to create a spiritually beneficial memory in the believer. He brings to our natural memory a spiritual knowledge and understanding about God, His plan for our salvation through the work of His Son Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life that is ours through faith in Him. A spiritual memory is developed in us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit’s power, we remember a God of mercy and salvation. Without the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives there would be no spiritual memory, no spiritual man in us.

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we

²⁹Luther’s Works, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 11, First Lectures on the Psalms II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 15.

may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught to us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.³⁰

The remembering that God refers to in the Scripture is a remembering which comes from a new spiritual wisdom and understanding. This spiritual remembering has restored us to a right thinking, a holy and righteous knowledge. This remembering clings to past events that have restored us to a right relationship with God. Through His law, God reminds us how in our sin we rejected Him, no longer remembering His perfect love and provision. This remembering brings us to repentance and changes our life. We no longer remain lost and clueless about God and His great promises for us. Luther writes:

To remember the works of God is not a bare contemplation of them but always to thank Him in them, and thus through them to place one's hope in God, fear Him, love Him, seek Him and to hate evil and flee sin. He who acts thus shows that he is truly remembering the works of God and not forgetting them. But he who does otherwise certainly shows that he has forgotten.³¹

By the power of His Spirit working through His Word and Sacraments, He repeatedly reminds us of His faithfulness and His great love for us despite our sin.

The Lutheran Confessions: Remembering the Acts of Christ

The subjects of remembering, remembrance and memory receive little attention in the Lutheran Confessions. Much of the discussion on remembering in the Confessions is found in two major issues. First, some sections include remembering when referring to confession and the Roman persistence of remembering and listing our actual sins.³² Second, other sections refer to Christ's closing words, "Do this in remembrance of me," the concluding words that instituted

³⁰1 Cor. 2:11-14 NIV.

³¹Luther's Works, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 11, First Lectures on the Psalms II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 11-12.

³²Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 185, 187, 315.

the Lord's Supper.³³ In both cases remembrance is connected to spiritual remembering, a remembering connected to faith that receives the blessings of God.

Our faith is grounded in the acts of Christ. This faith enables us to remember the sacrificial acts of Christ. When we meditate on and remember the redemptive work of Christ, our memory is refreshed and renewed as we recall this greatest act of sacrificial love shown to us by our loving Father.

Remembering that is life-saving is remembering that is done by one who believes in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through His Word, God reveals to us by the power of the Holy Spirit a new and desired relationship with us. Here He promises to save us from our sin. When we hear or read these words we also remember how He kept those promises as we recall Jesus' life and work done for us. The Word reminds us of the great work of Christ that fulfilled all God has planned for us. When God's Word comes to our minds we are reminded of Jesus' baptism, how He was anointed to go and begin His teaching and preaching work on earth. We are reminded of Jesus' power over the evil one as He defeats the devil in the wilderness. As we recall the Last Meal our Lord ate with His disciples before His death, we are connected to the remembering that takes place (at the Passover) in the Lord's Supper. Jesus' words to "take eat" and "take drink" remind us that we participate in a new meal where His body and blood are present. We are instructed to participate or to "do this in remembrance" of Him.

The Word of God goes on to remind us of Jesus' suffering and death at the hands of sinners. As we remember His being rejected and abandoned, even by His Father in heaven to die on a cross, we remember how this was all done for the forgiveness and cleansing away of our sin. We remember how Christ descended into hell to proclaim victory for us over death and eternal condemnation. His resurrection from the dead reminds us that He is the first fruits of

³³Oswald, 36:41, 169, 37:142, 38:111,116,122,125,126, 40:185, 208.

those who will be raised to eternal life. The disciples are to remember Jesus' promise that He would remain with them as they go into the world teaching and baptizing in His name. As Christ was lifted into heaven we are reminded of his final promise to come and bring His faithful to their eternal home. God's Word is a memory book designed to increase our remembering that God's will is for us to be His people and He our God. This work accomplished through His Son is written down for us to remember. Remembering is intimately involved in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther: Remembering as a Key to a Christian's Spiritual Life

In Luther's writings, much can be found on the subject of remembering and its importance for the life of the new spiritual person. Luther maintained throughout his life that "a persevering and constant remembrance was a significant dynamic of the Christian spiritual life."³⁴ Regarding Luther's definition of remembrance in the spiritual sense, one theologian writes, "Remembrance is an internal hearing of the eternal Word of God by faith, a recalling to consciousness of the divine promises of forgiveness and eternal life."³⁵ For Luther, remembering is that which God works in us through His means, a means by which God's grace exercises its continuing effect on a person. Winston Charles writes:

In Luther's theological anthropology, memory is persistent knowledge of God. More specifically, to remember is a work of the Holy Spirit engaging the whole person in a persistent consciousness of God *pro me*. Remembrance recalls God's promises time and time again in the midst of despair and confusion.³⁶

Deriving his theological understanding from the Word of God, Luther believes that remembering is not only remembering the Gospel promises but also remembering the law that

³⁴Winston B. Charles, *Remembrance as a Dynamic of Faith in Theology of Martin Luther* (Ann Arbor: UME Microform, 1993), 7.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 94.

reveals our sin. From there we are carried through acknowledgment of our sin, through confession and repentance to the open arms of God's mercy. Here, God desires a constant remembrance of His promises accomplished through Christ and the future eschatological promises. Charles writes of Luther's understanding:

In remembrance, the past, present, and future saving activity of God converge. Remembrance effectively recalls the past decisive act of God in Christ, which has firmly established the foundation of grace that withstands all assaults of sin and death.³⁷

For Luther, remembering was a law and Gospel remembrance. Luther, when commenting on Psalm 44:15 describes how one is left by the convicting work of the law, "All day long my disgrace is before me, and confusion has covered my face."³⁸ Remembering the law of God shows us our sin. The Word of God, according to Luther, is telling us that we live lives of confusion and chaos and need to repent of that confusion. Luther states:

To my mind, this is what the title wants to say, namely, to bring to remembrance, so that we might return to the heart and understand our confusion, which surrounds us because we have forgotten ourselves and God. No one can bring himself or God to remembrance without confusion and blushing. Consequently, when we are not in confusion and shame, this is a sign that we have forgotten ourselves, and we must read the prayer of this psalm to bring it to remembrance.³⁹

When God drives us to our knees through the work of the law, we are reminded of the utter hopelessness of our sinfulness. We have nowhere to turn, no plea for justice, no hope for any kind of life, and are left crushed and dead in our trespasses. This work of God's law reminds us of our broken relationship with God. On our knees we plead for mercy, cry out for forgiveness and salvation because we remember God's mercy. We turn to remember God's grace.

³⁷Ibid., 269.

³⁸Ps 44:15 NIV.

³⁹*Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 10, *First Lectures on the Psalms I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 386.

For Luther, remembering is that which God works in us through His means, a means by which God's grace exercises its continuing effect on a person. Human memory, knowledge or will can offer nothing to the foundation of salvation we have from God. However these three are important for building our spiritual lives on this foundation ⁴⁰

Remembrance for Luther is hearing the Word of God in such a way that one can recall it diligently. Nothing so reveals God to humanity as His divine Word that creates something out of nothing. Every word spoken from the creation of the world to the new life He has created in us through the work of the Word made flesh bring life and salvation to all who believe. As one theologian observes: "To remember is to reenter this creative dynamic of Word-received-by-faith in which sin is freely forgiven, trust is strengthened, and life is transformed."⁴¹

Charles proposes that Luther taught that there are three means by which the Word of God brings His grace to us – the oral Word, the visible Word and the written Word. The oral is that which is received through our sense of hearing His word, particularly as the Gospel is being preached publicly and sang in the liturgy. The visible Word of God comes to us through visible elements of water, bread and wine connected to God's Word. The written Word is that Word which is read, the inspired Word meant to be remembered by those who read, mark and inwardly digest it. Though not the only visuals that can be effectively used, there are no greater visuals we can use in worship and in our sermons than those great means of grace-- the visible written Word of God which when spoken we hear and the elements used in the sacraments which we also see, touch, smell and taste.

⁴⁰I Cor. 3:11-23 NIV.

⁴¹Charles, 103.

Baptism and Daily Remembrance

Luther connects remembrance closely with faith. In his writings he calls upon us to remember our baptism daily. When writing about the sacrament of Holy Baptism in his small catechism, Luther explains:

(Baptism) indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.⁴²

Daily contrition and repentance calls upon our memory to recall past sins. Better yet, these lead us to remember the Word of promise, the divine promises, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of faith, the hope for eternal life. It is also remembering the Word event of salvation: Christ's death and resurrection, our dying to sin and our being raised to life. It is the church's responsibility to help its members to remember their baptism daily. Commenting on baptism and remembering, Luther writes:

Their baptism should have been called to their minds again and again, and their faith constantly awakened and nourished...nourished and strengthened until death by the continual remembrance of this promise made to us in baptism...a penitent (is) to remember above all his baptism, and confidently calling to mind the divine promise which he has forsaken, acknowledge that promise before his Lord, rejoicing that he is still with the fortress of salvation because he has been baptized.⁴³

For as has been said, if anyone has fallen into sin, he should all the more remember his baptism, how God has here made a covenant with him to forgive all his sins, if only he will fight against them even until death...Then his heart again becomes peaceful and glad in the mercy of God promised to him in baptism, a mercy which God will keep forever.⁴⁴

The remembering in baptism according to Luther is a remembrance of God's promises.

When we remember our baptism we remember the gifts of the forgiveness of sins, life and

⁴²Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 360.

⁴³*Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament II* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 59.

⁴⁴*Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 37.

salvation that are promised. This grace remembered comes through this sacrament that uses as a visual aid, water. God uses water to remind us of how He has washed and cleansed us from all sin. This washing reminds us that our sins have been drowned and buried with Christ and how we have been made pure, holy and righteous. Each time we remember our baptism we return to that which is sure and certain, a foundation upon which God builds our faith in Him. Baptism and remembering are inseparably bound together for Martin Luther.

Lord's Supper and Remembrance

The Lord's Supper is also a sacrament requiring remembering. Our Lord Himself commands us in Luke's gospel to "do this in remembrance"⁴⁵ of Him. Our participation in this meal is meant to help us remember His saving acts done through His very body and blood upon the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. The Lutheran Confessions state:

Christ commands us to do this in remembrance of him. Therefore the Mass was instituted that faith on the part of those who use the sacrament should remember what benefits are received through Christ and should cheer and comfort anxious consciences. For to remember Christ is to remember his benefits and realize that they are truly offered to us; it is not enough to remember the history, for the Jews and the ungodly can also remember this.⁴⁶

The remembering in this meal is more than a sentimental last meal that Jesus had with His disciples before going to His death. This meal was meant to connect their hearts and minds directly to His death. Christ wants us to remember the "benefits" in such a way that this meal does something to us. In this meal our Lord wants us to remember the benefits of the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation that is ours through faith in Him. Through the remembering and participating we are nourished and grow in this faith in Him. Remembering in this meal is found in the doing, in the participation. Again, the Lutheran Confessions:

⁴⁵Luke 22:19, NIV.

⁴⁶Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 59.

For to remember Christ is not an empty celebration or a show nor something instituted for the sake of example, the way plays celebrate the memory of Hercules or Ulysses. It is rather to remember Christ's benefits and to receive them by faith so that we are made alive through them.⁴⁷

Luther affirms this understanding:

Bread and wine are eaten and drunk for the forgiveness of sins; that is, because Christ ordained them to be eaten and drunk in order to keep his remembrance, it is proper to call this an eating and drinking of the forgiveness of sins, since in connection with it we should remember that forgiveness and do as he says afterward, 'Do this in remembrance of me.' Just as one drinks wine to seal a sale, to show that it was a fair and just transaction which should be kept in remembrance and honored.⁴⁸

Remembering Christ's death, the work of taking our sin upon Himself, is not merely an individual remembering, but also a remembering done together as a community. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians tells us that when we eat and drink Christ's body and blood together in this meal we are "proclaiming his death until he comes." We are remembering God's future promise as we remember His past promises fulfilled. This remembering in the meal also includes remembering that Christ is truly present with us in our fellowship as we proclaim his death and anticipate his return. Luther states:

It is Christ's will, then, that we partake of the holy sacrament frequently, in order that we may remember Christ and exercise ourselves in this fellowship according to his example. For if his example were no longer kept before us, the fellowship also would be forgotten.⁴⁹

Both the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar are remembrance events within the framework of the Lutheran faith. In both Sacraments, the visual aids commanded by God to use remind us of His saving work. Water reminds us the drowning of our sin, or as Luther put it, our "Old Adam." It also reminds us of the cleansing or washing away of

⁴⁷Kolb, 271.

⁴⁸*Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 37, *Word and Sacrament III* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 44-45.

⁴⁹*Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 35, *Word and Sacraments I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 56.

our sins. The bread which holds the very presence of Christ's body and the wine which bring the very presence of His precious blood remind us of the sacrificial giving and shedding of His very body and blood on the cross for our salvation. The Confessions demonstrate that these two Sacraments are participatory acts designed and instituted by God for the purpose of our remembering through faith His eternal benefits given to us through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Visual Aids in Worship Enhance Memory

The water, bread and wine, however, are not the only visuals that help us to remember. In his book *Holy Things*, Gordon Lathrop speaks of the things used in the *ordo*, or order of worship, among them are visual objects expected to be found in the church setting.⁵⁰ Other visible objects are hymnbooks, stained glass windows, an altar, offering plates, paten, chalice, cups, crosses, the Book. When these symbolic objects are put into motion they express meaning. The worship experience takes place when these objects are put into motion by the people who are gathered. When we gather and use these things our memory about their meaning is refreshed and nourished. Temporary, contemporary and timely visuals are also important in helping the hearers remember the promises of God. Such things that have been added to the church are seasonal banners, statues of saints, candles, advent wreaths, flowers and the like. On memory and the use of liturgy and other visual holy things, Lathrop writes,

Our experience comes to the meeting (worship service) primarily through our memory... If the liturgy is healthy, full of the central things of Christianity, that memory will include more than church. Memories of meals and water, stories and gatherings in the 'world,' will all be part of the stuff that is reinterpreted in the current interactions. Indeed, the reason for the largeness and simplicity of the central signs is to allow many people's memories to come to the meeting: these things before us have to do with life as we know and remember it.⁵¹

⁵⁰Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 118.

⁵¹Lathrop, 126.

The visual objects found in the worship space can have a powerful impact on the memory, and therefore give opportunity for the Spirit to work repentance and faith in our lives.

Of course, the primary visuals used by the Spirit that impact our memory in worship are the Word of God and water, bread and wine in the sacraments. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, these visuals connected to His Word become the means by which God's grace comes to us reminding us of washing, body and blood. These visible means of grace are fundamental, but not the only visual aids that can be used. As we will see in the next section, the more senses that are involved in receiving the message, the longer the message will be remembered, the more this connecting of Spirit, faith and memory can happen.

CHAPTER 3

THE SENSE OF SIGHT AND RETENTION: A HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL STUDY

Introduction

Now that we have reviewed memory and remembrance from a Scriptural and confessional basis, we will investigate some historical and contemporary writings dealing with this specific relationship between visual aids and memory. This section will examine memory systems developed by the Greeks hundreds of years before Christ and then move to present day scholarship. We will discover how many experts in fields related to memory and retention teach that the sense of sight plays a significant role in helping us to remember for longer periods of time.

Historical Review

“Memory systems” have been studied and developed from the days of Simonides, a famous Greek orator and poet from 477 B. C. As a rhetorician, he was intentional about studying and developing the memory. He discovered that a speaker who memorizes what he wants to say is much more effective than one who reads his speech. People are more attentive and the speaker can be more personable in the presentation. Simonides discovered that a speaker can better remember parts of a speech by using mental pictures of things in a room or throughout a house. He can then attach each major move or thought in his speech to one of those images.

The first step was to imprint on the memory a series of ‘loci’ or places. The commonest, though not the only type of mnemonic place system used was the architectural type... Simonides’ invention of the art of memory rested, not only on his

discovery of the importance of order for memory, but also on the discovery that the sense of sight is the strongest of all the senses.¹

Another image memory technique that created a mental picture in the mind's eye was created by Roman rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian.

Cicero suggested that certain places must be firmly fixed in the mind; then symbols to be used in a discourse should be mentally arranged in those places. Thus 'the order of places would preserve the order of things, and the symbols of the things would denote the things themselves; so that we should use the places as waxen tablets, and the symbols as letters.' Quintilian was more specific in developing the method of association. He asked potential speakers to familiarize themselves with a series of visual images such as the rooms of a house and furniture in each room. They should associate part of what they have written or planned with each chair, statue, or the like in a room. Then when they speak they can imagine they are going into the vestibule of the house so as to be reminded of words or thought associated with it.²

From an early writing on memory entitled *Ad Herennium* we learn that "if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonorable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous, that we are likely to remember for a long time. Accordingly, things immediate to our eye or ear we commonly forget."³ In other words, what is commonly seen is not remembered for long, but when something is connected to what we see and hear that is out of the ordinary, it seems to be retained in the memory for a longer period of time.

For example, if you had a list of chores to do that you wanted to remember to do in a certain order such as take out the garbage, then stop by the store for some milk and bread, next pick up a package from the post office, followed by washing the car, and finally picking up some nails at the hardware store, you would associate these tasks with something unusual or ridiculous. For example, in your mind's eye you could imagine yourself dumping a can of garbage (take out the garbage) into a dairy case at the store. Next to the milk in the dairy case is

¹ Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 3-4.

² James L. Golden, Goodwin Berquist, William Coleman, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company 1978), 81.

³ Yates, 9.

a bag of frozen bagels (milk and bread at the store). On one of the milk jugs is taped a post-marked package (package at the post office) with your name on it. So you open it up to find a sponge (used to wash a car) that's oddly enough shaped like a hammer (used to hit nails). Within this ridiculous mind picture one could remember what the tasks were to be completed and the order in which to complete them. According to this technique, Simonides believed that remembering the unusual will help you to remember that which is common.

A fragment found dating about 400 B.C. known as the Dialexisis states that there are two aspects to memory:

This is the first thing: if you pay attention (direct your mind), the judgment will better perceive the things going through it (the mind). Secondly, repeat again what you hear; for by often hearing and saying the same things, what you have learned comes complete into your memory.⁴

Another way of stating this memory process is repetition, recitation, retention, and recall. This method was popular with Luther and is a method that has been used in many educational systems down through the centuries. Luther encouraged people in his day to read and learn the basics of the Christian faith using his small catechism. Heads of households were encouraged to teach their servants and children in such a way that they might retain and carry in their memory the basic foundation of the faith. Luther wrote:

Let all Christians drill themselves in the catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice... Let them constantly read and teach, learn and meditate and ponder... Therefore, it is the duty of every head of a household at least once a week to examine the children and servants one after the other and ascertain what they know or have learned of it, and, if they do not know it, to keep them faithfully at it.⁵

⁴Ibid., 29.

⁵Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 383.

This method of repetition and recitation is still popular to this day. In many of our Lutheran schools in America today, many of our children are still asked to orally recite and repeat over and over what they have memorized from Luther's Small Catechism.

Aristotle developed a theory of memory and reminiscence based on his theory of knowledge. He writes in his *De anima*,

...the soul never thinks without a mental picture, the thinking faculty thinks of its forms in mental pictures, no one could ever learn or understand anything, if he had not the faculty of perception; even when he thinks speculatively, he must have some mental picture with which to think.⁶

Aristotle believed that learning and retention is dependent upon “mental pictures.” The mind that has the ability to learn and remember relies on its ability to perceive, and the faculty of perception works through envisioning pictures. An effective speaker would be one who would have people use their mind’s eye in such a way that the hearer, relying on their mental picture, would be able to remember what he has heard for a greater period of time. Overall, a speaker who can get their hearers to make quality use of mental picturing will help them to remember what has been said.

Contemporary Writers

Modern day scholars on the subject of memory, Harry Lorayne and Jerry Lucas, refer back to these great Greek and Roman orators like Simonides, Cicero and Quintilian in their best seller, *The Memory Book*. They rely heavily on Simonides *loci* memory technique when explaining how to gain greater retention. They contend that all learning is based on memory. Their basic rule of memory is this: “You can remember any new piece of information if it is associated to something you already know or remember.”⁷ In other words, if you want to remember something, consciously remember it, then you have to connect in your mind with something you

⁶Yates 32.

⁷Harry Lorayne and Jerry Lucas, *The Memory Book*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), 23.

already know in order to train your memory. Our memory can be trained to improve. One of the association memory systems they shared was to picture or visualize in the mind's eye some kind of ridiculous image or picture that can connect two things you want to remember together. The ridiculous connection of two things actually improves the student's ability to remember.

For example, if I wanted to remember the Ten Commandments in their order, I would select the key words of each commandment to remember and then connect them with an unusual thought, something out of the ordinary. Let's say the ten words I want to remember are gods, name, Sabbath, daddy, kill, adultery, stealing, gossiping, house and wife. Knowing those ten words would help me remember the subject of each of the commandments. Now, I have to string together a series of absurd or unusual thoughts to connect them in that order. First, I could envision myself in a Hindu temple surrounded by many "gods." Under each of the gods is a "name" plate. Beside each name plate is a Jewish calendar with the last day of the week, the "Sabbath" Day, highlighted. On each calendar there is a picture of a priest preparing to "kill" a lamb for sacrifice. Walking out of the Hindu temple you see an open marketplace where a woman dressed as a prostitute whom you know has committed "adultery" is "stealing" a loaf of bread from a vendor who is spreading "gossip" about her to a fellow vendor. She runs with the bread to a nearby "house" she thinks is abandoned only to discover that the vendor's "wife" lives there. Notice how each word is remembered by an unusual or absurd thought. The thoughts can even be more radical and absurd without creating a story as was done in this example.

David Schacter, in his book on memory, says that memory is affected by all our senses, by everything in our system that feels and experiences the world around us. In one section in his book he describes how the visual plays an important role in the process of memory. In an experiment done on a college campus, students were given a beeper and asked to immediately record what they were experiencing at that moment. Later they would be asked to recall these

events to test their short-term memory. When asked to remember, “the episodes they recalled most accurately and confidently included visual images of what had occurred during the episode. The subjective sense of remembering almost invariably involved some sort of visual re-experiencing of an event.”⁸ This experiment shows the significance of the use of our sense of sight in helping us to remember. Schacter goes on to write,

Why does retrieving visual images tend to make us feel strongly that we are remembering a real event? Part of the reason is that some of the same brain regions are involved in both visual imagery and visual perception. Since we usually rely on these areas to perceive the external world, it should not be surprising that when we use them to create visual images, the images may feel like the mental residue of actual events.⁹

This visual imagery and visual perception walk hand in hand with Aristotle’s “mental pictures” theory. And Schacter explains how research in the visual sciences carried out by the Southern California College of Optometry has shown that visual images strongly impact our ability to remember. Their scientific research reveals that

...when you actually see something, an electrical impulse reaches the vision center of the brain. They’ve also discovered (rediscovered scientifically, really, since ancient philosophers said the same thing) that there is not much physiological difference between the electrical signals that are activated by the mind’s eye and ones that are activated by the eye itself.¹⁰

Jean Stine, in her book *Super Brain Power*, asserts that using her memory program can help one make use of the 90 percent of their brain that scientists say goes unused. She states that most scientists’ findings are based on the “assumption” that there is only one kind of intelligence—logical.¹¹ However, Harvard’s Howard Gardner, Ph.D., the author of the book,

⁸Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers: 1996), 32.

⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹Jean Marie Stine, *Super Brain Power: 6 Keys to Unlocking Your Hidden Genius* (Paramus, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Press, 2000), 6.

“Multiple Intelligences,” suggests that there are at least six types of intelligence.¹² Stine’s book helps the readers to unlock their “brain potential” or “hidden genius” found in these areas of intelligence. One of those areas she calls visual intelligence, or as she puts it, “picture smarts.” She writes, “Visual intelligence is the brain system responsible for processing and storing all visual images, real and imaginary...we make use of our vision from the moment when we wake until we retire at night.”¹³ When telling us how we can unlock our visual intelligence she explains,

Of all the body’s senses, sight is the only one connected directly to the brain...a high proportion of your gray matter is reserved for receiving, recording, and interpreting all that your eye sees...(and) we can take in ten times more visual information and make greater use of what we take in when we become proactive and make a conscious effort to see what’s around us.¹⁴

One key to memory is attempting to do all we can to create a proactive atmosphere that will help the congregational members to make more of a conscious effort to see what they need to remember. Stine goes on to say that when you focus this “visual intelligence” you become more conscious of what you see, more aware, more likely to remember.

What helps memory is when the visuals you are using are seen in context with what is being said. She writes,

Objects are easier to remember when seen in context than they are when seen alone...looking at a picture, or a chart, or a page, each individual object is glimpsed within a larger context, enhancing comprehension and retention...we remember because of the larger meaning that they (visuals) convey to us within that context.¹⁵

Association with places and symbols, connecting our thoughts to the ridiculous or unusual, repetition, and creating mental pictures are all techniques that have been used in the past. As you can see, remembering is best done when one can see or perceive what they are going to say or

¹²Ibid., 7.

¹³Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁴Ibid., 73-74.

¹⁵Ibid., 75.

what has been said. Even though it is the mind's eye rather than the physical eye that has been highlighted in these memory techniques, the visual aspect of memory played an important role in these past memory systems.

Application for the Church

A number of Christian scholars have also researched and studied the impact of the visual sense upon our memory. The rhetorician Boncompagno of the middle ages developed memory rules. He believed that natural memory can be assisted by visual aids. About Boncompagno's writing, *Rhetorica Novissima*, Francis Yates writes,

Against the arguments of those who say 'that natural memory cannot be assisted by artificial aids' it can be urged that there are many mentions in the scriptures of artificial aids to memory; for example, the cock-crow reminded Peter of something, and this was a 'memory sign.' This is only one of these alleged memory signs.¹⁶

These memory signs provide us mental pictures that remind us of what God has told us in His Word. As Christians, we believe there are numerous memory signs God has given us to remind us of His great promises and gifts in our worship as well. Among these signs are water, bread, wine, the cross, and his written Word. Through our constant use of these visuals God creates in us long term memory—constant and consistent memory.

But are these the only visuals that can help us to remember what God has spoken to us through a worship service? These are essential to worship, but there are other visual aids we can use during the service and the sermon to connect us with God's gifts of grace. For example, during a sermon you might use a large print of a famous painting when preaching a sermon on Jesus calming the storm, or maybe a flashlight when preaching on the text when Jesus describes himself as the light of the world, or a shepherd's staff to connect to the numerous passages about our Lord as shepherd.

¹⁶Yates, 59.

But just how effective are the use of visuals in a sermon upon the retention of the hearers?

Citing a publication called *Communication Briefings*, Thom and Joani Schultz report that,

People forget 40 percent of a speaker's message within 20 minutes. They forget 60 percent after a half day. And after a week they lose 90 percent. These figures apply to gifted speakers as well as lackluster ones.¹⁷

They go on to write that any visuals speakers use greatly increase the retention of their hearers. In a study done at the University of California, what people see was found to be most significant in helping hearers retain what a speaker has said.

How the speaker sounds (inflection, tonality, voice variety, emphasis, and energy) communicates 38 percent of the message. And what the listeners see carries 55 percent of the message. This includes the speaker's appearance, gestures, movement, and visual aids. Only 7 percent of the message that listeners receive comes from the words themselves.¹⁸

These statistics alone persuasively argue for making use of visual aids in a sermon.

Our minds think in pictures. Using our mind's eye we perceive information through mental pictures. Eslinger writes that this imagery formed in the mind's eye needs to be concrete. "For preaching to form within the immediacy of thought rather than to be simply heard as words, this imagery will need to be concrete and connected to the lived experience of the hearers."¹⁹ He goes on to quote David Buttrick who said, "I've got to talk...so people can see."²⁰ Although, Eslinger is referring more to using words to paint mental images, we once again discover the significant influence that the sense of sight has in helping hearers to retain what they hear for a longer period of time.

When using visuals, the words you use to connect the content of God's Word with the visual will be important to help people retain what they are seeing and hearing. Repetition can

¹⁷Thom and Joani Schultz, *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 1993), 243.

¹⁸Ibid., 244.

¹⁹Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 144.

²⁰Ibid., 145.

be helpful when making a connection between a visual aid and a given text. Increasing hearers' attention when using a visual can be accomplished especially if the visual has a function or moves or does something other than just remains static. For example, a moving banner in a processional will draw the congregational members' attention to it, and it will become more memorable than a banner that is just hanging on the church wall. Some churches have the practice of removing the "Alleluia" banner on Transfiguration Sunday to help the participants remember that they are entering a time in the church year that focuses on repentance and meditation until the day the word is resurrected. On Easter they are reminded of even a greater resurrection as the "Alleluia" is brought back into sight. Repeating these activities using these visuals each year will assist in improving the memory of those worshipping.

Preachers have the opportunity to bring the saving events of the past into the minds of the people through the visual aids God has given--Word, water, bread and wine. As cited earlier in this chapter, Schacter writes, "the subjective sense of remembering almost invariably involved some sort of visual re-experiencing of an event."²¹ Re-experiencing is what happens in the repetitive actions in the worship event. There in the worship setting is a re-experiencing of the work of God in our lives and the blessings He offers.

Simonides said that remembering some unusual or ridiculous image when connecting two visuals helps the speaker to improve his memory. In a sense, God has used a most unusual or ridiculous looking visual aid to help us remember His saving acts of love for us. That work is seen in the most unusual, unbelievable and to some the most ridiculous actions of Jesus Christ. This ridiculous visual of the cross as described by Paul to be "a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks"²² immediately reminds Christians of the blood Jesus shed to save the

²¹Schacter, 32.

²²I Cor. 1:23b NIV.

people of the whole world. How ridiculous that an instrument of torture and death can actually bring life and peace. Yet the cross is the most powerful visual for the believer in that through the wisdom of the cross we are confident of our salvation. Through that weak and foolish looking cross we have received the forgiveness that was won for us there. We receive through the use of other visuals such as water, bread and wine this very forgiveness won for us on the cross. In the tradition of the Lutheran Church at worship, these visuals used at our Baptism and the Lord's Supper are accompanied with the sign of the cross. Preachers have no greater or powerful visual than the cross of Christ.

Just as important is the empty tomb. There at the empty tomb we find our eternal hope. This image of a dark and empty tomb is one that brings to the minds of Christians light and fullness of life. These are the ultimate visuals of the spoken word of God. It is this saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to which all other visuals used in preaching must direct our hearers.

One major goal in the delivery of any sermon is to get the hearers to remember what has been said concerning the saving Gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Visual aids can give us the opportunity to help the hearers of that message carry it with them into the rest of the week and in some instances the rest of their lives.

Now that we have researched some of theological, historical and contemporary information about remembering and retention, the next chapter will cover how the project was designed, describe the research tools that were used and the methods used to implement the project.

CHAPTER 4

THE DESIGN OF THE VISUAL AID PROJECT

Introduction

A theological justification for the use of visuals has been demonstrated. In Scripture, we have discovered how God uses our human senses to help us to remember what He has done for us. The means by which He brings us His grace is through visuals like His holy Word and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. God uses visuals so that we remember how He has delivered us from our enemies of sin, death and the devil through the redeeming work of His Son Jesus.

Since we have discovered through our study thus far that God used visuals in the past to remind His people of His saving work, pastors today would do well to use visuals that do the same. They would best use visuals that direct the hearers' attention to the death and resurrection of Jesus in such a way that this redeeming activity will be remembered.

The Problem and Goal of the Project

This research will demonstrate how the sense of sight can help make the Gospel of the sermon memorable for a longer period of time. We will see that the use of sight, specifically using visual aids, is an effective way to assist the preacher in improving the attention of his hearers and their retention of the message. In addition, the project also sought to answer these questions: When are visual aids more effective in increasing the retention of the message by the hearer? When and how are visual aids helpful? When can they be distracting? How often should pastors consider using them? What are the better ways to use visuals in a sermon?

This project was carried out to demonstrate the usefulness of using visual aids in the sermon. In order to find out what was remembered after hearing a sermon, a survey sheet was developed to be completed by selected hearers who attend worship on a regular basis. Sermons using visual aids and sermons not using them were preached. The hearers that were selected were uninformed ahead of time so that they would not be tempted to pay extraordinary attention. After hearing the sermon they were asked to fill out a survey at the close of the week before hearing their next sermon. These simple surveys were designed to discover how much of the sermon event was retained five or six days following. The participants were asked simple questions to discover whether or not they remembered any use of biblical text, whether or not they could recall the main point of the sermon, whether or not a visual aid was used, and if so, how was it used to remind them of what was said. Once these surveys were gathered, the data was analyzed to determine what the hearers remembered. The results of this project would then provide information that would address the questions stated above. The purpose of this research is to show how the use of visual aids during the preaching of a sermon does indeed help the hearer retain what he has heard for a greater period of time.

The Development of the Project

To keep the project manageable, only three pastors and their congregations were asked to participate. The pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod asked to participate were as follows: Rev. Glenn Nielsen, serving Grace Lutheran Chapel, Bellefontaine Neighbors, Missouri; Rev. Terry Grebing, serving Zion Lutheran Church, Bunker Hill, Illinois; and myself, serving Faith Lutheran Church, Godfrey, Illinois. Grace Chapel is a large congregation located in the northern inner suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri. Zion Lutheran Church is an aging medium sized congregation located in a rural area of southern Illinois about an hour's drive of St. Louis. Faith Lutheran Church is a young congregation located in a growing bedroom

community of the St. Louis metropolitan area. The pastors selected for this project have each been preaching for over 15 years and delight in using visual aids in their preaching.

To begin with, the participating preachers received a letter informing them how to implement the project. They were given a period of approximately three months in which they were to choose three weekends where their sermons would be evaluated by members who attend worship on a regular basis.

At their own discretion, they were then asked to select 12 people who they believed would do a good job evaluating their sermons. They were to select two different people to evaluate each one of their sermons. Those selected were not to know that they had been selected until they received in their hand one of the surveys. Once the hearer received the survey, they were to immediately fill it out and return it to their pastor. The preachers were asked to follow this procedure because the purpose was to find out how much they retained at the end of the week the sermon was preached. The letter stressed that they were to not tell the participant in advance that they would be evaluating the sermon. Other criteria for selection of a hearer was that they needed to be someone who did not have to deal with any outside distractions like tending to children or ushering and anything else that may have presented a distraction. They were asked to select someone who they observed appeared to be attentive during the delivery of their sermon. The evaluation form asked several basic questions about the sermon.

Next, the letter went on to inform the participating preachers about the sermons and when they were to be delivered. The first weekend they selected to deliver a project sermon they were to deliver a sermon using a visual aid to the first group of hearers and only a description of the visual aid was to be given to the second group of hearers without actually showing the visual. The second weekend the first group of hearers would be given only a description of the visual aid and the second group would actually be shown the visual during the delivery of the sermon

they hear. During the sermons preached the third weekend, the visual aid was to be shown to both groups.

About the sermons, the preachers were given the opportunity to select their own texts to preach on. They were also informed that the purpose of the visual that they chose was intended to be used to connect the hearer to the main point of the text. They did not have to preach the sermons using visual aids three weeks in a row, but were allowed the three month time frame in which to complete the project and return the completed surveys to me.

A copy of the survey form accompanied the letter explaining the project which they were asked to copy and distribute to those who were selected to complete them. The actual questions asked on the survey are as follows:

- To the best of your recollection, what Bible passage was used for the sermon? Even if you only know the book of the Bible that was used, or the chapter or a verse or two, please write that down.
- Do you recall any of the words or phrases quoted from the Bible text? If so, what do you remember?
- In a sentence or two, what do you remember most about the sermon?
- Was there a visual aid used in the sermon?
- If a visual aid was used, please describe it.
- If a visual aid was used, please describe how it was used in connection with the Bible passage?

As you can see, the questions get right to the heart of the answering the question being proposed by the project. Do visual aids truly help us retain what we have heard in a sermon, especially the text and the main point that was presented? In the next chapter, we will see if the hypothesis that visuals do indeed help us retain what we have heard for a longer period of time will be shared.

The following note was found at the bottom of every survey so that the evaluator was made aware of the criteria given to the preachers. “NOTE: This evaluation is to be done by total recall. Please do not refer to bulletins, newsletters or sermon notes. Please fill this form out as soon as you receive it and return it to your Pastor immediately.”

Each of the preachers then proceeded to carry out the proposed project in their own parish.

Rev. Nielsen selected for his first sermon text Romans 8:14-18.

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The sermon theme was “Adoption Papers.” The main idea of the sermon was when we were baptized, we were born again, adopted into the family of God. A copy of the Pastor's baptismal certificate was used as the visual aid. The preacher used his baptismal certificate, comparing it to “adoption” papers. When we are baptized, we are officially brought into a new family as a son or daughter of God. The right has been given to us to call God 'Abba, Father.'

For his second sermon, Rev. Nielsen used a text from Mark 4:35-41.

The day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind they took him along, just as he was in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher don't you care if we drown?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'

The theme for this sermon was “Quieting the Storm.” The main idea of this text is that even when we don't think that the Lord cares that we are drowning in the troubles of this life, He is there saying, 'Quiet! Be still!' Do we have such little faith that we no longer see the truth that

He does indeed care for us and is powerful enough to show he cares? The visual used was a painting of Jesus standing in a boat during a storm with his disciples behind him. Of course, the painting directly connects the hearer to the text by showing the text through art.

In his third and final sermon, Rev. Nielsen preached on Ephesians 2:19-22.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The theme for this sermon was "Building the Church." The main idea of this sermon is that we are to trust more in God's building the church rather than ourselves. The visual aid was a building made out of Legos. It had a white cornerstone, a white cross in the foundation and white blocks going up the middle. Three odd-shaped walls were also added to the building. The preacher used the Lego building to describe just how God is putting His church together. He used the odd sides to describe the imperfection of the church in this world. He spoke of Jesus as the cornerstone and the foundation with the cross in it as the message of the apostles, Christ crucified and raised, upon which the church is built. In conclusion, the preacher described how God is building his church today through Word and Sacrament.

Rev. Terry Grebing, pastor of Zion in Bunker Hill, selected as his first sermon text Isaiah 61:10.

I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

The sermon theme was "Robed in Righteousness: I'm Ready!" The main idea of this sermon was that apart from Jesus Christ, we are totally unprepared for the Last Day. We are totally prepared for His return on the last day when we are clothed in Christ Jesus. There were a

series of visual aids used in this sermon. First the preacher went into the sacristy to change into a blue bathrobe. Next, he went into the sacristy and came back out dressed in just his suit and tie. The next time he emerged from the sacristy he came out in just his alb. Finally, someone from the pews in the congregation came up and placed the stole and his cross necklace upon his neck. A connection was made between the clothes mentioned in the text, the Pastor's vestments and the spiritual clothes we wear because of Christ. The clothes we put on that matter most are the robes of righteousness earned through Christ's death and resurrection which offers eternal life. Only because of his redemptive work are we able to wear these clothes, clothes that cause us to respond in works of love and gratitude.

The second sermon preached at Zion was actually not written or delivered by Rev. Grebing. Seminarian Dan Borkenhagen was the preacher of the second sermon and was supervised by Grebing. This text was taken from Ezekiel chapter 37:1-14.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'O sovereign Lord, you alone know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord...'

The sermon theme was, "Being Brought Back Home." The main idea of this sermon was the proclamation of life from death. Even as "crazy old Ezekiel" was proclaiming to those in exile the hope of being brought back home by the power of the lord, so also, the Lord is proclaiming the importance of revitalization to a church that is often lifeless and misdirected, bringing us back home through Jesus Christ. The visual aid used was an old cow's skull and a couple of femur bones. The connection of the bones to our life is that they represent who we are in our sin, spiritually dead and lifeless. The Lord has revived us through the life-giving work of

His Son Jesus who not only died on the cross but was resurrected to new life. We now look forward to resurrection, the day when God will make new tendons and flesh appear on our new immortal bodies. By the way, this was the first sermon written and delivered by this preacher.

For the third and final sermon delivered at Zion, Rev. Grebing used II Corinthians 12:7-10 as his sermon text.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The sermon theme was "Bowled Over." The main idea of this sermon is that even though we, like Paul, are 'bowled over by life' Christ and other Christians can pick us up again. When bruised and battered by adverse circumstances in life, described in this sermon as 'thorns in the flesh,' we have Christ Jesus' death and resurrection to lift us up. We also have our brothers and sisters in Christ to pick us up when we are knocked down. The visual aid used in this sermon was an old worn out bowling pin that was awarded to the preacher back in 1970. The pin was used to characterize our life as a Christian. There are many things that come along in life that knock us down, that put us in the gutter. The preacher described us as 'five pins' who are surrounded by Jesus Christ, the Head Pin, Word and Sacraments as 'two or three pins' and fellow Christians as the remaining pins. We are 'bowled over by his grace.' The Lord as our Head Pin protects and preserves us when life knocks us down and beats us around. God's grace and mercy

through the death and resurrection of Jesus picks us up.¹

Rev. Curtis Deterding, the project coordinator and pastor of Faith Lutheran Church used John 17:11b-12 as his first sermon text.

(Jesus prayed) I am coming to you holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that the scripture would be fulfilled.

The sermon theme was “Kept in God's Name.” The major idea in this sermon was that the power in the name of Jesus is forgiveness, salvation and life everlasting, a name by which we cling to in body and soul in faith; a name we bow to and live by. The visual aid used in this sermon was a scaled down replica of a popular billboard seen nationwide which simply had the name Jesus in capital white letters on a green background. The signs appear in the same colors as you find on the interstate exit signs. Using the name Jesus on the visual, the preacher spoke of the power of the name. The name truly leaves a powerful image in the minds of those traveling on major national highways. Jesus' name truly leaves a lasting impression on us, a name which offers the great eternal gifts of salvation and life everlasting. There is no other name under heaven by which a man is saved. That's the kind of power we find in this name.

For his second sermon, Rev. Deterding chose Mark 4:25-29 as his text.

Jesus also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

¹ Although the focus of my paper was not on evaluating sermons, a word about the use of this visual is important to mention here. Here is an example of a visual that can actually create confusion and cause difficulty in the mind of the hearer. The concept of “being bowled over” is contradictory. First, the preacher is telling us that we are being bowled over by the “adverse circumstances in life.” Yet, later in the sermon we are told that we are “bowled over by (God’s) grace.” Jesus is also portrayed as a pin who gets knocked around right along with us, but after being bowled over by trial or grace. As you can see the connection between visual and text is lost. Be aware that visuals can become a distraction if not implemented properly.]

The sermon theme was “Ripe for Harvest.” The main idea of the sermon is like the stalk of wheat, God plants faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, into our hearts, causes it to grow and bear fruit until the day He comes in all His glory to gather his harvest for eternity. The visual aid was the one used by Jesus in the text, wheat stalks that were ripe with grain in the heads. The wheat stalks were used to represent us in our lives as Christians. God provides the soil the planting and the growing of our faith in our lives, a faith that will produce fruit, like the head we see on the stalk of wheat. This faith is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the very Bread of Life given for our ongoing nourishment in the Sacrament of the Altar.

The third and final text used by Rev. Deterding is II Corinthians 4:5-12.

For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

The sermon theme was “The Light of Christ—Created, Given, Revealed.” The main idea of the sermon is that the saving knowledge that comes to us from the Word of God that enlightens us, comes through the power of the Holy Spirit, through faith. The knowledge we see in the face of Christ is our redemption, salvation and eternal life. The visual aid used for this sermon was a foot square box that had black construction paper pasted all around it on the outside except for the four inch hole cut out of one side of the box. The box was held together with straight pins. When the pins were removed the box opened up to reveal the shape of a cross. In the middle of the cross was a copy of the face of Jesus taken from a famous print of a painting of the resurrected Jesus. Jesus' face sat on a heart that covered the entire center of the cross. The

cardboard was cut out behind the picture and red heart and a lamp was placed behind the picture at a strategic point in the sermon so that when you looked at the cross you would see the face of Jesus lit up. The light was literally shining through and from the face of Jesus.

The connection that was made with the text using the visual aid is several layered. First of all the “glory of Christ” is seen in the work he did for us on the cross. The cardboard unfolds into the shape of a cross. The opening in black box was described as Jesus, the light who breaks into our dark world of sin and evil to let his light shine into and through our lives. The knowledge of him as the light and His face in our hearts is also seen in this visual as described in the text. What gives us the light of knowledge is God's Word and the Spirit which allows us to understand that the glory of God is seen in the face of Christ. The light shining through Christ's face on the cross is to remind the hearers that we have the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ in our hearts.

After these sermons (see Appendix 1) were preached, the preachers had the participants they selected take the survey and return them. Following the completion of the third sermon and evaluations the surveys, the sermons and additional comments were delivered to me. I had received all the surveys and sermons within a month of the project deadline. Now, with the data in hand I began to organize and tabulate the results of the survey. The information and data provided by those surveys will be provided and discussed in the the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

In this chapter the data that has been provided by the hearers on the survey evaluation forms will be organized, analyzed and interpreted. The data will be used to address the practical questions put forth in the opening chapter of this paper. Those questions are as follows: Are visual aids more effective in increasing the retention of the message by the hearer? When and how are visual aids helpful? When can they be distracting? How often should pastors use them? What are the best ways to use visuals in a sermon?

Analyzing and Interpreting the Evaluations

Below is a gathering of the data from the hearers' survey evaluation sheets. Each question asked on the evaluation is followed by a summary of the responses of the evaluators. An interpretation and analysis of this collective data will assist us in addressing and answering the preceding questions. The evaluation forms asked specific questions about what was remembered about the sermon that was preached the previous Sunday. There were six questions total. Please note that from the three congregations there are only a total of 12 hearers who evaluated sermons that did not use a visual aid. The number of evaluators that heard sermons using a visual is 25. The four evaluators whose scores appear in the last line are a unique group in that they are pastors and not members of any of the participating congregations. However, these four had listened to one of the project sermons where a visual was used. Unbeknown to them, they were asked to evaluate that sermon almost four months later. Although this is a very small group, they

were included to give us an idea of how long a visual sermon might remain with the hearer. Note that the pastors group was not included in the total since they did not follow the criteria set forth by the project.

We begin the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data with question one asked, “To the best of your recollection, what Bible passage was used for the sermon? Even if you only know the book of the Bible that was used, or the chapter or a verse or two, please write that down.” The results of the question are found in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
REMEMBERED THE BIBLE TEXT USED FOR THE SERMON

<u>No Visual Aid Used in Sermons</u>				
	No	Yes (correct)	Yes (partially correct)	Yes (wrong)
Faith Lutheran Church	3	0	0	1
Grace Lutheran Church	1	0	2	1
Zion Lutheran Church	3	0	0	1
TOTAL	7	0	2	3
<u>Visual Aids Used in Sermons</u>				
	No	Yes (correct)	Yes (partially correct)	Yes (wrong)
Faith Lutheran Church	4	0	1	4
Grace Lutheran Church	2	1	5	0
Zion Lutheran Church	2	0	6	0
Pastors Group	3	0	0	1
TOTAL	8	1	12	4

Looking first at the answers of those hearers where no visual aid was used during the sermon, we discover that none were able to state correctly what the text was. A couple of them remembered the book the text was from, but not the exact text. Several attempted to guess, but to no avail. Ten of the twelve were unable to identify the sermon text.

Interestingly enough, among the 25 who were present during sermons that incorporated a visual aid, we still find that all but one did not know the exact text used for the sermon. However, the majority of the listeners were able to recall the book of the Bible and in some cases the chapter. Still, almost 50% of visual hearers were not able to identify even the book the text came from.

The four pastors were also among those who viewed a visual aid during the sermon and after several months were unable to recall what text was used. Even the pastor who thought he might and attempted a guess was mistaken.

In the final analysis, the answers to this first question show that where a visual aid was used, there was a dramatic increase in those who could remember something about the text itself. This is significant in that those who heard the sermons without the visuals couldn't remember even a phrase or idea from the text as illustrated by the answers in Table 2 below . Question two on the evaluation form was, "Do you recall any of the words or phrases quoted from the Bible text? If so, what do you remember?"

TABLE 2
WORDS OR PHRASES REMEMBERED FROM THE BIBLE TEXTS

<u>No Visual Aid Used in Sermons</u>				
	No	Yes (correct)	Yes (partially correct)	Yes (wrong)
Faith Lutheran Church	4	0	0	0
Grace Lutheran Church	0	1	3	0
Zion Lutheran Church	4	0	0	0
TOTAL	8	1	3	0

<u>Visual Aids Used in Sermons</u>				
	No	Yes (correct)	Yes (partially correct)	Yes (wrong)
Faith Lutheran Church	3	2	2	2
Grace Lutheran Church	1	6	1	0
Zion Lutheran Church	3	4	1	0
Pastors Group	3	0	0	1
TOTAL	7	12	4	2

Most preachers would agree that they would like for those who hear their sermon to carry away in their memory at least the content of the text. Knowing the book and text location would just be icing on the cake. In the data gathered above, we again discover that for the most part those who were present when a visual was not used were not able to remember any portion of the text. However, this was not the case at Grace. All four who completed the survey were able to identify some portion of the text.

But when a visual aid was used, the results are much better. Of the 24 hearers, 16 were able to remember some if not the majority of the text. My evaluation here is somewhat subjective. Those who were counted as correct quoted a portion of the text correctly or slightly paraphrased it. At Grace for example, one participant wrote, “Jesus is the chief cornerstone;

built on the foundation of the apostles; in him the whole building is joined together.” This is almost a quote word for word from the Ephesians 2:19-22 text that was used for that sermon. At Zion, a participant simply wrote, “Be clothed in righteousness,” which is what the text from Isaiah 61:10 says. “...and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.” The sermon theme was “Robed in Righteousness: I’m Ready!”

Others who caught the gist of the text were counted as those who were partially correct. For example, in connection with the sermon “The Light of Christ—Created, Given, Revealed” based on II Corinthians 4:5-12, the participant wrote down, “Jesus is the light.” This is similar to the sermon theme and close to the quote in verse 6. “For God...made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

There were those who thought they knew the text but actually quoted other texts altogether. In one of those two cases, the participant actually quoted a text from another sermon delivered the week before. Here we observe that sometimes our sermons may actually cause our hearers to identify our message with other texts with which they are familiar. Identifying other texts with the message that was delivered is still beneficial to the hearer in that they are retaining the saving message of the Gospel as recorded somewhere in God's Word. Many times hearers will share something they remembered about the sermon that was never said. And there are other dynamics that are at work here such as faulty memory, a memory that fades in and out over time, and the fact that our minds have a habit of wondering off during the preaching of the sermon.

Even with the use of a visual aid, there were nine hearers unable to recall what was said from God's Word. What we need to take into account are the possible distractions that may have been present, the state of mind of the hearers, their ability to remain attentive and the like. And again, when it comes to a greater period of time, even pastors who viewed a visual aid during a sermon were unable to remember any portion of the text that was used.

TABLE 3

REMEMBERED THE MAJOR THOUGHT ABOUT THE SERMON

<u>No Visual Aid Used in Sermons</u>			
	No Answer/Incorrect	Partially Correct	Correct
Faith Lutheran Church	3	1	0
Grace Lutheran Church	0	1	3
Zion Lutheran Church	2	2	0
TOTAL	5	4	3

<u>Visual Aids Used in Sermons</u>			
	No Answer/Incorrect	Partially Correct	Correct
Faith Lutheran Church	3	2	4
Grace Lutheran Church	0	0	8
Zion Lutheran Church	2	0	6
Pastors Group	0	3	1
TOTAL	5	2	18

On the evaluation form, question three asked, “In a sentence or two what do you remember most about the sermon?” The hearers may not be able to remember exactly where the sermon text came from and might even struggle to remember with the help of a visual aid. However, they at least have an idea about the content of the sermon. In Table 3 above, we discover that with a visual aid, the hearers' memory seemed to be stronger concerning the sermon's content. Of the twelve who were among those where a visual aid was not used, seven either got this answer partially or completely correct. Again, there was a great deal of subjectivity used when evaluating these answers. Those who were given full credit were able to state the central thought or main idea of the sermon or something from the sermon itself that connected to the main idea.

Among those at Zion who heard the sermon “Bowled Over,” one wrote, “regardless of how we are in our lives or where we are that Jesus is always there and we can be knocked down several times in our lives but he is never knocked down or taken out.” The main idea of that sermon was that even though “we are bowled over by life...Jesus our Head Pin bowls us over with grace.” The answer, which was given by one who saw the visual was close to describing the main idea stressed in the sermon. Their evaluation demonstrated that they understood and remembered what this sermon was about.

Those who were listed as partially correct, knew something about the main thought of the sermon but were not able to accurately articulate it. One participant who saw a visual sermon at Faith entitled, “Ripe for Harvest,” wrote down, “Grinding the wheat in your hand reminded me of when I used to do that as a kid.” The answer indicated that the hearer saw the visual and the movement of the preacher's hand and was honest about what they remembered most about the sermon, but missed the point of the sermon. After hearing the sermon “The Light of Christ,” delivered at Faith, a participant wrote down the generic answer, “The preacher told us about what Jesus did for us and our salvation.” Again, this answer is partially right because this answer could have been given for almost any sermon and this is a true statement about this sermon that they remembered most.

Notice once again the dramatic increase of correct answers among those who were present during a sermon using a visual aid. Even the pastors who had heard the message four months earlier were able to recall something about the sermon they heard. The sermon they heard was “Robed in Righteousness: I'm Ready!” presented by Rev. Grebing at Zion. The one pastor who got the answer correct wrote that “the preacher related the yoke and the alb to our righteousness in Christ.” The others said that the preacher “made the sign of the cross with his arms,” and “he used his robe to explain to us how we are outfitted to serve Christ,” and yet another wrote, “he

kept going out of the pulpit and changing clothes.” These are all correct answers, but only one correctly identifies with the major idea of the text. The answers here give us a strong indication that the visual assisted in retaining in the memories of those hearers something of what was done or said in that sermon. In one case the visual was directly connected to the text. The visuals used in the sermon were a bath robe and the robe or alb that a preacher wears. The use of an alb would have hit closer to home for a group of pastors. Nevertheless, all four of them were able to recollect something about the sermon.

TABLE 4
REMEMBERED THAT A VISUAL AID WAS USED DURING THE SERMON

<u>No Visual Aid Used in Sermons</u>		
	No Answer (Correct)	Yes Answer/Incorrect
Faith Lutheran Church	4	0
Grace Lutheran Church	3	1
Zion Lutheran Church	1	3
TOTAL	8	4
<u>Visual Aids Used in Sermons</u>		
	No Answer/Incorrect	Yes/Correct
Faith Lutheran Church	0	9
Grace Lutheran Church	3	5
Zion Lutheran Church	0	8
Pastors Group	0	4
TOTAL	3	21

In Table 4 above, the question asked on the sermon evaluation form was, “Was there a visual aid used during the sermon?” It may seem somewhat surprising that the hearers who did not see a visual during a sermon would suggest that they actually did. The 3 who answered that

they had seen a visual should be explained. Two of the three from Zion believed that the picture their pastor painted for them in their minds eye to be the visual aid. Although, this preaching technique can prove to be very effective, these hearers through their own admission have shown that they did not actually view a visual aid. In identifying what the visual aid was in their response to the next question, they identified the use of imagination comparable to an actual physical visual aid. The third hearer at Zion, who actually wrote down the answer, “not sure,” said that pastor had used the children in his children's sermon in such a way that it served as a visual aid to them during the sermon. So this hearer counted the visual from the children's message as the visual for the sermon. This answer was placed in the yes category since a later answer indicated that this participant believed the children were the visual aid. The one from Grace legitimately thought a visual aid had been used.

All three of the pastors who participated are accustomed to use visuals now and then when they preach. Even when they do not use a visual, their language helps their hearers to envision a visual image in their mind's eye. The use of visual language is a powerful way to help people retain what is preached. For the most part, people will generally remember better when the sermon is more visual—whether through an actual object or through picturesque language.

Quite unusual and contrary to the other sermons that used visuals aids are the survey results from the three participants from Grace Chapel who did not recall a visual aid being used. When contacted about the use of this visual, the preacher from Grace said that the visual may have been too small (a certificate of baptism) for most of the congregation to see from where they were sitting. Of all of the sermons in this project that used visuals, with the exception of this one sermon, the hearers remembered a visual aid being used. Even the pastor's group could remember that a visual had been used several months earlier.

What the answers show is that our memory is improved by introducing a visual aid. If a pastor can make good use of this additional sense in his sermon, his chances of helping his hearers to retain what he has said for a longer period of time are also be increased.

TABLE 5
REMEMBERED THE VISUAL AID USED DURING THE SERMON

<u>No Visual Aid Used in Sermons</u>			
	No Answer/Correct	Answer/Incorrect	
Faith Lutheran Church	4	0	
Grace Lutheran Church	3	1	
Zion Lutheran Church	1	3	
TOTAL	8	4	

<u>Visual Aids Used in Sermons</u>			
	No Answer/Incorrect	Answer/Incorrect	Answer/Correct
Faith Lutheran Church	0	0	9
Grace Lutheran Church	3	0	5
Zion Lutheran Church	0	0	8
Pastors Group	0	1	3
TOTAL	3	0	21

It should be no surprise to see that the answers from those who did not see a visual aid are the same as those in the previous answers and for the same reasons. According to the answers shown in Table 5, everyone who could remember that a visual aid was used actually remembered what the visual aid was. Question number 5 on the sermon evaluation form simply asked, “What visual aid was used?” Even all but one of the special group of pastors remembered the visual aid that was used. If the connection between the visual and the text is explained well, then this

ability to retain the visual aid could be helpful to the hearer in retaining what they heard in a sermon for a greater period of time.

TABLE 6
REMEMBERED CONNECTION BETWEEN VISUAL AID AND SERMON TEXT

<u>No Visual Aid Used in Sermons</u>			
	No Answer/Correct	Answer/Incorrect	Answer/Correct
Faith Lutheran Church	4	0	0
Grace Lutheran Church	4	0	0
Zion Lutheran Church	3	1	0
TOTAL	11	1	0

<u>Visual Aids Used in Sermons</u>			
	No Answer/Incorrect	Answer/Incorrect	Answer/Correct
Faith Lutheran Church	0	1	8
Grace Lutheran Church	3	2	3
Zion Lutheran Church	0	2	6
Pastors Group	3	1	0
TOTAL	3	5	17

Here we see just how effective the sense of sight can be in helping retain what we have heard. The final question asked on the sermon evaluation form was, “How was the visual aid used in connection with the Bible passages?” The results from this question are found in Table 6 above. Of course, this question would not apply to those who did not see a visual aid used. The one from Zion who attempted to answer this question was one of those who believed the visual used during the children's message served as the visual for the sermon.

On the other hand, we find that everyone who saw a visual aid attempted to make a connection with what they believed the text was and the visual. Notice how 17 of the 22 who remembered the use of a visual aid were able to some way connect it to the actual sermon text. This question is similar to question number three and the results were similar.

Remember that only 7 of the 12, just a little over half of those who did not see a visual aid during the sermon, were able to recall what the sermon was about. However, 20 of the 25, or about 80%, who saw a visual aid could remember what the sermon was about. Of those 25, 17 (close to 70 %) were actually able to connect the visual aid to the Bible passages used of the sermon text.

Among those 17, one respondent from Zion who heard the sermon: “Robed in Righteousness: I’m Ready!” wrote “The Lord is coming. We need to be ready. Wherever we are the time is not known.” And another wrote, “Whether a person is clothed in a bathrobe in relaxation or a pastor's robe in humility and praise, we should always be ready for Jesus to come again.” These participants took away from the sermon the need to be ready. This was the emphasis of the text in Isaiah as well, where we find the bride and the bridegroom coming together as Christ will with his church in the end.

At Grace, one respondent wrote of the connection between the visual and the text in the sermon, “Building the Church,” “The Legos illustrated the different types of foundations that a church body can have. The church is being tested with things happening in the world and we need to stay strong in our beliefs. Thus, the strong foundation.” And another wrote, “There were white blocks on a corner to represent the cornerstone of Jesus. Also a cross on the bottom that went to the top to say Jesus is with us always.” And yet another wrote, “The Lego Church was used to show that the Holy Temple, the Church, even though some of the sides are a little lopsided, is built on the foundation, which is Jesus Christ and building blocks are added

constantly.” In response to the sermon “Adoption Papers” based on the Romans 8 text preached at Grace, one participant wrote, “The preacher and we are born again when baptized. The preacher put his baptismal certificate up in his office as a reminder when he was baptized.” Another wrote, “He shared he was God’s child by adoption as sons.” All of these answers show that the main idea of the messages that were preached is being retained by those who have viewed a visual during the delivery of the sermon.

Of the 17 respondents, 16 according to question number 2 were able to recall a portion if not most of the text that was used. But the majority of those who were not exposed to a visual aid according to question 2 could not recall, or could recall very little if anything at all, of the the text.

What Does This Mean?

How do these survey evaluations help us to answer our questions about the use of visual aids in sermons? Those questions again are as follows: Are visual aids more effective in increasing the retention of the message by the hearer? When can they be distracting? How often should pastors consider using them? When and how are visual aids helpful? What are the best ways to use visuals in a sermon?

First of all, are visual aids more effective in increasing the retention of the message by the hearer? According to above analysis and interpretation, the answers to the surveys would indicate that the use of visual aids increases our memory as hearers. A number of factors can cause this information to be faulty, such as the ability of the hearers to retain information in general or how many distractions the hearers encountered. Some may have daydreamed or had something else on their mind during the sermon. With all of that aside, however, the surveys do indicate that when visual aids are used in sermons, they are helpful in increasing the longevity of

our retention. They are even helpful in connecting us to the text in such a way that the language of the text is remembered for a greater period of time as well.

Can visual aids become a distraction? When reviewing the sermons used in this project one observation was made concerning the choice of the object that is used as the visual aid. All of the sermons used visual aids in this project that directly correlated with the content of the text. For example, in the sermon where the text was about Jesus comparing believers to a stalk of grain, a stalk of wheat was used as a visual aid. When the text was about Jesus in a boat during a storm with his disciples, that very copy of a painting of Jesus in a boat in a storm was shown to the hearers.

There was, however, one sermon among the nine where the visual aid was completely foreign to the text and the theme. That was the sermon entitled, "Bowled Over." The visual aid was an old beat up bowling pin. No story or texts in Scripture immediately come to mind when one thinks of a bowling pin. Scripture does not mention a bowling pin. Throughout the sermon, the preacher is indeed very creative in connecting the visual aid, which is completely alien to the text, and importing some of the environmental and functional aspects of the bowling pin to the text and in turn to our lives.

In my own experience, I once used a tennis ball as a visual aid. Not once is a tennis ball mentioned in the Bible unless you consider the old joke about how "Joseph served in Pharaoh's court." The purpose of a tennis ball is to be one of the objects used in playing the game of tennis. I was using the ball for another purpose other than what was intended. At the beginning of the sermon I explained to the congregation, while holding the tennis ball in my hand, that I was going to throw this ball sometime during the delivery of the sermon. The sermon was based on I Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." The

visual was used to demonstrate “slowness in keeping his promise.” I had made a promise to throw the ball during the sermon. I didn’t say when. Some may have had the impression that I was slow in keeping my promise; some may have thought that I might forget. Near the close of the sermon I did indeed keep my promise and threw the ball off to the side in a large container so that it would not bounce around and hurt anyone. The anticipation, the wait, the wondering why it takes so long to keep a promise was the basis of that visual. I created an unusual function for a tennis ball. I was simply going to throw it. Tennis balls are to be tossed to be served and batted with a racket over a net for sport. So not only did I import an object alien to the text, but a function alien to the object. The connection is not natural. If a pastor needs to spend too much time attempting to make the connection between the object and the text, chances are it may be more distracting than helpful in getting the hearers to remember the text.

Consider the objects Jesus used as visual aids. When speaking about having the faith of a child, he used a child as his visual aid. When speaking about His body as a temple, he used the very temple in Jerusalem as His visual aid. When we see a rainbow in the sky we know that it is God’s visual aid that comes during stormy weather, usually after it rains, that reminds us of His promise never to destroy the world again with a flood. There seems to be a direct connection between the visual aid and the promise found in God’s Word.

In using both a bowling pin and a tennis ball as they were used in these sermons, the visual aid can become a distraction rather than serving the gospel by connecting us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every pastor will need to struggle with this consideration as he chooses the visual aid he will use in their sermon.

How often should pastors use visuals? Although the survey analysis doesn’t directly address this question, the answers would indicate that pastors should consider using them more often if they are not already using them on a regular basis. In the Scriptures Jesus’ preaching and

teaching most often paint a picture in our mind's eye using a parable or story, but he also uses a visual aid to explain God's Word to the people. The purpose of the visual aid is to help people see God's Word with their eyes in such a way that they remember that Word as they return to their daily lives. Pastors who are not yet comfortable using visual aids may want to try using them once in a great while. As their comfort level goes up, pastors may consider using them more often, especially if the text offers the use of one. Part of a pastor's sermon study could include considering the use of a visual aid. If one does not come to mind he would then pass on using a visual for that sermon. However, there are many opportunities to use visuals. Further, the more a pastor makes use of them, the more he is able to see those possibilities.

Visual Aids Serve the Gospel

When and how are visual aids helpful? What are the best ways to use visuals in a sermon? Visual aids are most helpful when they do not distract us from the main idea or thought of the text and are used to serve the Gospel. When they help us most is when they increase our ability to retain the Gospel proclaimed in the sermon.

The central focus of every sermon should be the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In my seminary days I learned if a pastor preached a sermon that leaves out Christ, then he has not preached a valid sermon. If he has not preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he has merely given a speech that could be given anywhere. To preach a sermon that is all law will leave the hearers terrorized and fearful, overwhelmed by the expectations of God and consequences that result because of their sin. A sermon that uses the law of God as an avenue to follow to get to heaven only provides a moralistic perspective that is eternally devastating and is not what God's Word teaches. What makes a truly biblical Christian sermon unique is that it tells us of the work of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Should every visual aid that is used be only used when it directly connects us with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? For the preacher, the central purpose of the sermon is to get his hearers to the Gospel. The visual aid that supports the central major thought of a Christian sermon is eventually going to get us to the cross and the open tomb. According to the research and the results of this project, the visual aid is such a powerful medium that it will be the predominant idea etched into the memory of the hearer. To use the visual aid to focus the hearer strictly to the law of the sermon will make the law more prominent, rather than the Gospel. To focus the visual on only the bad news of God's punishment and wrath, His unattainable expectations for us to be his people, is not where the preacher wants his hearers primarily focused. Because of the influence the visual has on our memory, the preacher should use his visuals to support the Gospel and the good news that through faith in our Savior we will live eternally. So when a pastor is preparing for a sermon and considering the use of a visual aid, he needs to discover how the visual will best get his hearers to the saving message of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Conclusion

Bringing a visual aid into a sermon is extra work. But when the benefits of using a visual aid are considered, incorporating one into a sermon now and then will not only be refreshing to the hearers, but will also increase their attention as they make use of their sense of sight. As we have seen throughout this project, increasing the use of our sight increases our ability to remember for a longer period of time. Visual aids can be very useful in helping our hearers carry the message with them throughout all the days of the week. This connection will help them grow in their remembrance of what God has done for them in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6

GUIDELINES AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this project was to research the use of our sense of sight, specifically when using visual aids, as an effective way to assist the preacher in improving the attention of his hearers and retention of the message. The project that was conducted for this study agrees with the research conducted in the past. As we have seen throughout this study, making use of this sense of sight does impact the hearers' ability to retain what was said for a longer period of time.

Specific questions this study sought to answer are as follows: Why use visual aids during a sermon? What theological justification is there for using visual aids? Are visual aids more effective in increasing the retention of the message by the hearer? When and how are visual aids helpful? Can they be distracting? How often should pastors consider using them? What are the better ways to use visuals in a sermon? These questions will be addressed under the proposed guidelines which follow in this chapter. For answers to these questions, we first turn to some recent studies conducted by those who study the human brain and memory.

One recent study of lay people showed that:

People forget 40 percent of a speaker's message within 20 minutes. They forget 60 percent after a half a day. And after a week they lose 90 percent...research (goes on) to indicate people retain only about 10 percent of what they learn through spoken or written communication, but they remember up to 90 percent of what they learn

through direct experience. Maybe it's time for pastors to take advantage of that information and vary the methods they use during sermon time.¹

The findings of the data gathered from the research in this study show that after a week, 70 to 80 % of the hearers were able to connect the visual used in a sermon with the message delivered. When compared with the above statistics the reason to use visuals in sermons becomes obvious; they help the hearer better retain what was heard.

One study that showed visuals truly impact retention was done at the Wharton School of Business. There were two audiences that received presentations. One audience received the information solely through verbal communication. The other control group presentation included visuals. When evaluated, those conducting the test discovered that more than 20 percent more of the audience that saw the visuals reached consensus over the other group, 17 percent of the visual group found their presenter more convincing and even the decision making came much more quickly in the visual group. And "if that's not enough evidence to consider" the article went on to say, "consider this time-saving point. The study also concluded that using visuals cut meeting time by 24%."²

In a study conducted at Washington University in St. Louis, "Scientists prove that pictures, not words, put (the) brain in higher gear."³ This study was done among college students. The students were to use pictures to remember specific appointments and assignments due over a specified period of time. The ability to remember was increased according to the study. The bottom line was that the use of sight helped to increase retention. This study strongly supports the effectiveness of visual aids in a sermon to help the hearer remember for a greater period of time..

¹ Mike and Amy Nappa, *Bore No More: 70 Creative Ways to Involve Your Audience in Unforgettable Bible Teaching* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 1995), 8.

² "Here's the Visual Evidence," *Communication Briefings*, (Alexandria, Virginia).

³ John Carlton, "Scientists Prove That Pictures, Not Words, Put Brain in Higher Gear" (St. Louis Post Dispatch (Monday December 14, 1998), A1 and A7).

The use of static visuals in sermons can be very effective in improving the retention of the message in the mind of the hearer. Using a visual in a sermon is not done in the manner we see object lessons done for children. Using them does not presuppose that the adults are slow to get the point. In fact, the use of visuals actually aids the memory of adults better than children, according to Brant Baker.

The problem with most (not all) object lessons, however, is that they fail to take seriously the work of those who tell us how children think and learn. The most notable of these, Jean Piaget, has suggested that the ability for abstract thought does not emerge until relatively late in childhood development, somewhere around the ages of twelve to fourteen... This lack of ability for abstract thought undercuts most (children's) object lessons, which are based on making a comparison between the object and some religious truth.⁴

Baker goes on to argue that for younger children, participatory lessons that help children use their imagination will actually become more memorable in the minds of children rather than an object lesson which demands more abstract thinking.

While participatory lessons might be an effective way to help children remember what was said in a lesson, visual objects can be just as effective if used properly. Since young children tend to think more literally than conceptually, then use a visual that is more literal to get them to the theological truth of the text. For example, if you are trying to help the children understand the concept of eternity by using a circle that has no beginning or end, they will not be able to make that conceptual leap. However, if the text speaks about Jesus dying on a cross, then use a cross to show the literal object upon which He gave His life. Children can remember longer with the use of literal objects.

⁴Brant D. Baker, Let the Children Come: A New Approach to Children's Sermons (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 11.

For adults however, abstract thinking allows them to make the connection between the visual and the text. If the connection made between the visual and the text is done well, the visual will become an asset in helping the hearers retain what they have heard for a greater period of time.

“A sermon needs to connect the hearers to the text and the text to the hearers. A visual aid can help make that connection.”⁵ “Visuals work through our sense of sight, but they can also make us aware of the other senses. Words and visuals together increase the possibility of teaching through all of the senses.”⁶ To see the Gospel message in the mind through the use of a visual aid actually records in the mind like a photo or video. “The visual as a reminder is a photograph of an idea; a visual in action is a video of an idea.”⁷ In other words, visuals can be used to help us remember the central Gospel content of a certain text, kind of like a still shot photo, but visuals can also connect the hearers to the action of the text, kind of like a video.

A research team from Group magazine found that the average parishioner is in favor of his Pastor implementing more experiential activities and visuals into a message. A poll that was taken of lay people indicated that:

...if their pastors used one or more new methods such as guided active-learning experiences, short dramas, object lessons, or interactive discussion during a sermon time, nearly 90 percent said they'd be supportive and anticipative. That means nine of 10 people here on a Sunday morning would welcome the idea of you incorporating new methods in your sermon time.⁸

In other words, in most cases people would likely support the use of a visual object to clarify a major point in a sermon. True, the few that don't want a visual aid to be used can be

⁵Eldon Weisheit, Let's Illustrate: The Whys and Hows of Sermon Illustration (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1998), 97.

⁶Ibid., 104.

⁷Weisheit, Let's Illustrate, 101.

⁸Nappa, 111-112.

vocal, but with proper pastoral care and discretion, many detractors may eventually become comfortable with the idea as well.

Communication scholars at the University of California have discovered that what a person sees during a presentation or a sermon impacts memory retention the most.

The words speakers so carefully choose actually carry a minimal part of the message. How the speaker sounds (inflection, tonality, voice variety, emphasis, and energy) communicates 38 percent of the message. And what the listeners see carries 55 percent of the message. This includes the speaker's appearance, gestures, movement and visual aids. Only 7 percent of the message that listeners receive comes from the words themselves.⁹

Research shows that the use of visuals in a sermon can impact the ability of the hearer to remember what he or she has heard for a greater period of time. The visual aid is not the message. The words of the preacher that connect the visual aid to the text will also impact the hearer's ability to retain what was said. For the pastor, the one purpose of using a visual aid is to engage the sense of sight to increase the hearer's ability to remember what was said. In order to make the best use of visual aids during a sermon, the following set of guidelines has been developed to assist pastors.

A Set of Guidelines for Using Visual Aids in Preaching

Since visuals are effective in helping the hearers retain what they have heard, then what is the best way to prepare and present visuals in the sermon? The following guidelines have been developed to assist the pastor to plan and prepare the best way to use a visual in the sermon.

1. The focal point of the visual in a sermon is the Gospel.

The visual aid that a pastor uses in a sermon should not just simply point out some sub-point in the message to better clarify what was meant historically or to try to explain what is already obvious. "Visual aids need a purpose. You as preacher need to know their purposes,

⁹Thom and Joani Schultz, Why Nobody Learns, 243.

and you need to let your hearers know why you are using them.”¹⁰ As stated earlier, the message's primary purpose is to lead the hearers to the Gospel and if this is being done, then the visual object should be connecting the hearers to the Gospel.

The visuals pastors use can be vehicles by which the Spirit of God brings to our memory the salvific plan and work of God in the lives of the hearers. If the visual does anything other than this, it has not captured the purpose for which it is being used. To recall a visual that was used means little if God's message of salvation is not somehow remembered in connection with it. The visual needs to connect to the Word. It needs to serve the Word.

In each of the nine sermons preached for the project, the preachers connected the visual aid they were using to the Gospel. In the sermon, “Kept in God's Name,” the visual was the name of Jesus in big capital letters like on popular billboards seen across the nation. What does the Scripture say about this name Jesus. There is no other name by which we can be saved. In the sermon “Being Brought Back Home,” the bones were used to remind the hearer of Ezekiel's text on the valley of dry bones. The visual of bones was used to point us to the Gospel message that one day God is going to put tendons and flesh on those bones because of work of Jesus. Through resurrection power we too will one day be raised to live forever. “Building the Church” a sermon based on Ephesians 2 used the visual aid of a building made out of Legos. The very cross of Christ could be seen as the foundation of the building which represents the church. Built on the cross and that Apostolic Gospel message we will one day enjoy an eternal building in the new heaven and earth. The cardboard cross with the lighted face of a resurrected Christ, the bowling pin, the baptismal certificate, the painting of Jesus calming the storm and the stalks of wheat all lead to the Gospel in those sermons.

¹⁰Weisheit, Let's Illustrate, 97.

Is there ever a time when the visual can be used to connect the hearer to the law in a sermon? Remember that visuals do help retain what is heard in a sermon. If the visual connects to the law which reminds the hearer that he or she is lost and condemned sinner, the preacher will not want that to be the primary goal of the message. If a preacher is using the object to connect the hearer with a third use of the law, then in a sense the visual is serving the Gospel. Under this use, the hearer is hearing the law as one who knows his salvation is certain and now desires to respond according to God's will. This use of the law only applies to those who know Christ and the Gospel. At these times, a visual aid can be appropriately used.

So when a visual is used the Gospel must predominate. A visual is best used when it proclaims the Gospel in the most powerful, the most memorable moment in the message. A visual used in this manner will bring the saving Gospel message of Christ's death and resurrection to the forefront of the sermon.

2. *Control the interpretation of the visual as much as possible.*

The visual should have more points of connection to the central Gospel theme than it does of departure. "Identify exactly which point you want to illustrate with your interactive idea (visual object)... Which point do you most want people to remember?"¹¹ Or a more important question is: How do I get the people to remember what I want them to remember? We are not just talking about affecting the intellect here, but the entire person. The visual should be a memorable experience for the hearer.

For example, in the sermon, "The Light of Christ—Created, Given, Revealed," the preacher went back to his visual aid several times throughout the sermon. Each time he pointed out something different or new about the visual in connection with the message. The result according to the surveys is that only one aspect if any of the visual was actually remembered.

¹¹Nappa, 9.

There were also several takes on how the visual connected with the text that were about as varied as number of points that was being made using the visual. The preacher needs to ask himself whether or not the visual is too busy and whether or not he is making too many points.

The preacher needs to be very explicit about the visual being used. He needs to be so clear and the use so well understood that when he is finished the hearer is not left scratching his or her head wondering what the meaning or connection was.

“The danger of object lessons is...(when) the sermon explains the object”¹² rather than enhancing or holding out the Gospel message. An improperly used visual can actually leave the parishioner with more questions than answers about what is the most important point or goal of the sermon. A poorly presented visual can get the listener side-tracked and actually result in poorer retention or in missing the Gospel altogether.

3. *Prepare and practice in advance actually using or demonstrating the visual you are planning to use.*

Anticipating how your use of a visual will go and actually demonstrating its use can be two very different things. The visual needs to be tested if it will be doing something. “A properly used visual aid will help a well-prepared sermon be understood and remembered, but it will not make the sermon.”¹³

For example, one time I was using a visual aid to demonstrate Paul’s claim that “I can do everything through (Christ) who gives me strength.”¹⁴ I asked someone from the congregation to come and attempt to stand an unboiled egg on its end on a flat surface. They tried for awhile but with no success. I then took the egg with me into the pulpit and stood it up on the flat surface on the front so everyone could see. When I practiced this earlier I got the egg to stand up every

¹²Weisheit, A Sermon is More than Words, 22.

¹³Weisheit, Let’s Illustrate, 96-97.

¹⁴Phil. 4:13 NIV.

time. Even in the first service when I preached I was able to do it. You see, I used just a dash of salt which when spread on a flat surface will hold the egg up. Well, needless to say, the salt I had originally put on the pulpit was gone and I couldn't actually use the visual as I had planned.

Not being prepared or not being sure that the visual will work every time you attempt to demonstrate it can actually become a distraction rather than a benefit to the hearer.

4. *Make sure your visual is visible.*

Make sure that your visual can be seen by all. When an object is being shown and it is not able to be seen, the listener may not fully appreciate the visual.

The results of the survey revealed that there was one sermon, "Quieting the Storm," where none of the hearers remembered that a visual aid had actually been used. It was the only sermon where this happened. Upon further investigation, the preacher of this sermon explained that the painting that was being used as a visual may have been too small and the hearers could have found it hard to make out what it looked like.

When selecting an object to show, do not use objects that are too small or unrecognizable but find the best visual objects to use since you are using them to point to Christ and His saving work. For example, if you were to use a stone as your object, you would not want to show a picture of a stone or hold up a stone that is too small to see, but you would want something that can be seen, that is visible to every hearer. A real stone that can be easily seen will be remembered for what it actually is, rather than being shown as a picture or a pebble.

Some visuals, even though they cannot be seen, can be described in such a way that they can be envisioned in the mind's eye. Common objects can be recognized simply through a brief description. But the very nature of a visual aid is that it can be seen, so it needs to be visible and easily identified by the hearer's eyes.

5. *The visual needs to successfully increase the retention of the main Gospel theme.*

The visual aid should be used in such a way that it will increase retention of the central gospel point you are making. Weisheit suggests that “Visuals are a good way to help people remember a text for future use. To do this, the visual must be from the text itself so the person who sees the visual will recall it when reading the text later on.”¹⁵ To help the hearer remember the text proclaimed in the sermon, the preacher needs to allow the central theme of the text to determine what visual could be used.

The visuals used in four of the project sermons were actually the objects mentioned in the texts they supported. They included a picture of Jesus calming the sea, a stalk of grain, dry bones and a robe. However, the other five sermons used visuals not directly described in the texts, yet the way in which they were used connected the hearer to the central theme of those texts. The survey results showed just as much retention of the text with or without a visual aid pulled directly from the text. In fact, when the picture of Jesus calming the storm was used as a visual which was the actual story in the text, the visual wasn't even remembered.

True, visual objects are a good way to help people remember the text you are preaching from. But it is not necessary to use an actual object mentioned in the text. Some texts do not suggest any tangible object that could be used as a visual aid. What is important is that the preacher allow the text to drive the metaphor of the image and the purpose for the use of the visual, tying into what the text is suggesting.

6. *Make sure that the actual object is appropriate and not objectionable.*

Objects that are offensive or cause one to sin in thought are inappropriate for use in a sermon. A preachers goal is to feed the flock with God's Word, not distract them with objectionable visual aids.

¹⁵Ibid., 99.

For example, in a sermon I heard many years ago, Jesus was being compared to a bottle of Pabst Blue Ribbon. I found the object being used objectionable because there are too many negative aspects connected with beer such as drunkenness and alcoholism. To be honest with you, I can't remember the text that was used nor how the comparison between Jesus and the bottle of beer were developed. No one walked out on the preacher, but I do remember how offensive those who heard the message found it to be.

There are other examples that could be given that people might find inappropriate in a worship service. For example shooting a starter pistol, using fake vomit or dog excrement, using pictures with crude language or scantily dressed people would be objectional to many listeners. These would not be considered appropriate objects for the worship setting and could cause offense.

The bottom line is to select visuals that are tactful, presented in good taste, and will not distract the listener from the message being proclaimed. If in doubt about the appropriateness of an object, you may want to discuss it with some of your wisest critics or colleagues who will give you an honest opinion before using it in a sermon. Chances are that if you are questioning whether or not to use the visual aid, the best decision may be not to use it. Make mature choices that you know will not cause people to be distracted from the Gospel. Instead solidly point them to the Gospel goal of the text.

7. *Take care not to overuse a visual.*

Overuse of a visual to illustrate different points in different sermons may become confusing and break down the ability to remember specific associations. Sometimes the same visual might do well with similar texts and could be used again to demonstrate the same point.

Variety is important. Visual aids are a powerful means to make the Gospel memorable. Although this study has concentrated on just the use of static objects as visual aids, there are

others that could be used to provide more variety in proclaiming the Gospel. For example, there are other ways to utilize the hearers' physical eyes and even their mind's eye so that they can see a visual in their imagination in order to connect them to the text being proclaimed. One way is to use our words to paint visuals in the minds of the hearer. The biblical narratives themselves cause us to see what is happening in our mind's eye, our imagination. Allowing people to participate through drawing or creating something with their hands during a sermon is yet another way people can utilize their eyes to connect to what is being said. Some pastors have used puppets and video clips from movies to connect their hearers to the text. People have different learning styles. Some of these ways to utilize the use of sight might be more effective for some than others. Using visuals now and then may be more helpful than trying to use them in every sermon.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of guidelines, but it can help to govern the use of the visual in preaching. These guidelines suggest that the best use of the visual is to hold out the Gospel of Jesus, His life, death and resurrection, so that the hearers will not leave without hearing and seeing God's deliverance and salvation.

Overall Analysis and Impact of the Study

Do the use of visual aids in a sermon help the hearers retain what is preached? The answer according to the research conducted in this study is a resounding yes! As a result of the findings and the research recorded in this paper, this preacher has begun to use more visual aids in his own preaching. Because visual aids help assist the hearer in remembering the sermon for a greater period of time, I will be planning to discover ways best to use visual aids when preaching.

The people of the congregation I was serving during the project were reminding me of visual aids I had used years before. They did not always connect them to the correct texts used

for those sermons, but the visuals kept them connected in other ways to the Word of God. In the congregation where I currently serve, visual aids are being used weekly during the children's messages and more are being brought into the sermons. Remember that with children you will want to use literal objects rather than conceptual objects to help them retain the theological truth of the text.

This study has only increased my own appreciation for the use of visuals in the preaching event. Although using visual aids takes more time and effort, I will seek to find more opportunities best to use them because of their ability to increase the hearers' retention. We should take advantage of every opportunity our Lord places before us to make His saving Word heard and remembered by those to whom we are proclaiming it.

Conclusion

This study has affirmed that the use of visual aids in a sermon does help the hearer remember what the preacher has said for a greater period of time. Carrying in their memory God's Word spoken in a sermon, keeping His Word in their hearts and minds for a greater period of time can only be a benefit to our hearers. Knowing that the use of the sense of sight impacts the memory in this way is cause for preachers to consider using visual aids more often in their preaching.

The Scripture has shown how God uses visual aids to utilize our sense of sight for the purpose of helping us to remember His work and promises. Much of Jesus' teaching in the New Testament involved the use of visuals. Jesus Himself is described as a visual of God's saving grace, as John describes Him as "the word made flesh" who has come to dwell with us. This Incarnate Word, this Lord Jesus Christ, used everyday objects and actions to help the people remember the plan and will of His heavenly Father. Jesus described Himself visually as the Light of the world, a Gate, and the Good Shepherd. When Jesus is called the Lamb of God, we

instantly remember Christ as our sacrifice for sins once and for all. Jesus uses a number of static and live visuals in His preaching and teaching, such as lilies of the field, a child, a coin, the temple, a head of wheat, water, bread and wine, not to mention all the mind's-eye visuals Jesus created through His use of parables, such as that of a shepherd and a seed. As Jesus Himself has demonstrated, visuals are an effective tool to help your hearers retain the major central Gospel thought or focus of your message.

This study has also shown us that there is a link between the visual images we see and the theological words we hear that can powerfully impact our memory. Dean Nadasdy, in his essay in the book *Liturgical Preaching*, emphasizes this fact with a childhood memory. His pastor would oftentimes gesture to a sculpture of Jesus at the front of the sanctuary during his preaching to point that Jesus is the Word incarnate. The statue was etched into Dr. Nadasdy's memory. This link between the Word being preached and the gestures toward the statue of Jesus "created an inescapable link between word and image, between the Word incarnate and the word ensculptured."¹⁶ Nadasdy explains that good preaching is both heard and seen and the sermon is where the oral and visual meet. The visual with flesh on it, the word attached to it, or in a sense the word incarnate, is what makes what is being said memorable. Visual aids, effectively used, can help us retain for a longer period of time what is preached.

¹⁶Paul Grime, and Dean Nadasdy, ed, *Liturgical Preaching: Contemporary Essays By...*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 191.

APPENDIX 1

MANUSCRIPT OF SERMONS PREACHED FOR THE PROJECT

By

- Rev. Curtis Deterding
Faith Lutheran Church, Godfrey, Illinois

- Rev. Terry Grebing
Zion Lutheran Church, Bunker Hill, Illinois

- Rev. Glenn Nielsen
Grace Lutheran Chapel, Bellefontaine Neighbors, Missouri

- Seminarian Daniel Borkenhagen
Zion Lutheran Church, Bunker Hill, Illinois

Rev. Curtis Deterding preached the following three sermons.

Deterding Sermon # 1

2ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Text: II Corinthians 4:5-12

Theme: "The Light of Christ—Created, Given and Revealed!"

Grace, peace and mercy be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This week my brother asked me to go with him to the movies. We went to see the movie, "The Hulk." Great special effects, kind of a wimpy story line, and it's loaded to the hilt with violence. Not really my kind of movie. But once again, I was fascinated about how they used light and darkness in movie. Have you ever noticed about movies? If watching shows like Spiderman, the Matrix, Men in Black, and other popular contemporary movies, have you ever notice how they contrast their use of lightness and darkness? Some movies like the Matrix are dark movies almost all the way through. Of course, shadowing, blackness give us a sense that evil is close at hand, danger is lurking nearby, pain and death are only seconds away. When things get black and dark you can bet that something bad is about to happen. When the action is well lit and the lighting is good, things are generally progressing well in the movie. When light comes, it exposes the darkness and for the most part seems to still be winning out over darkness. Back in the days of black and white movies and television you'd always see the bad guys in black and good guys in white.

This Hollywood concept of the battle between the forces of good and evil is nothing new. Most movies used to show the good guys coming out on top. Now we don't even know who the good guys really are in movies. Some of the bad guys look better than some of the good guys and in many movies now, there is no really identifiable good guy--that is not in the true sense of goodness, goodness as we know it from God. Unfortunately what has been usually reserved for the dark side is now being used to make us believe that it is good. What has been shown to be on the good side is now being shown for the evil it really is. Movies are no longer black and white, morally speaking. The line between evil and good, light and dark is being mixed and the goal of many movie writers and producers is to have their viewers leaving believing there is a lot of gray in our world, that things are far from being black and white. Many movies leave you believing that eventually everything works for good, even evil itself. Ah, another dark deception of Satan. No, this good and evil, black and white, light and darkness thing is nothing new, in fact, it is as old as the Bible.

When I'm teaching the 7th and 8th graders, I like to read them Ephesians 6:12 like this: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Doesn't that sound like something that could have been said by Captain Picard or Luke Skywalker as they describe their universal enemies? Well, this is not from some movie, this is from the word of God. God is telling us that there are "powers of darkness," and "spiritual forces of evil," at work all around us in our lives. That spiritual power and evil comes in all kinds of immoral and corrupt packages.

Darkness is found all around us, even on the sunniest days. St. John describes the world as

darkness when he writes in the first chapter of his Gospel about Jesus the light coming into our world: “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” Paul describes our sinful lives as darkness before we knew Christ in Ephesians 5:8: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” We first need to hear the antithesis of what Paul wrote in our text by listening to the verse just prior to our text. “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Let’s give credit where credit is due. The “god of this age” is Satan. According to this verse he causes spiritual darkness in the lives of people, he darkens their spiritual eyes so that they cannot see. Through his evil schemes we have fallen into sin, and continue to be lured into the darkness by his constant temptations. His evil and our sinful flesh has blinded us, kept us in the dark about God and His saving light, the glory of Christ.

I have brought with me today a special box designed to illustrate and complement what God is telling us in His Word found in our epistle reading. For the most part, I have made the outside of the box black to demonstrate a how this box represents a world of darkness a world of sin. On the one side you can see that I have cut a hole in it. From where you are sitting, tell me what do you see when you look into the hole? The color black? Emptiness? Darkness? If you squeezed your face up against the hole so that no artificial light can get in at all, all you would see is darkness and blackness. That’s exactly the way things are without Jesus in our life. All we know without Him is that this world is dark and bleak and hopeless. In our sinful human minds we rationalize that if evil and immorality don’t get you, and if sickness and disease don’t get you, and if poverty and hunger don’t get you, and if depression and suffering don’t get you, death will. The day we die is a dark day, because for most people who do not know Christ, when that day comes, it’s all over. The day we die is a dark day indeed. People even wear black to our funeral as a sign of mourning and sorrow.

Last week Saturday was a dark day for the Bohnet family as they received the tragic news of their loved one Sigmund. Their minds must have been darkened by the amazement and shock of what had happened. It was a day like any other for those in the deep-sea fishing business there in Portland. The weather might have been a little rougher than usual, but this fishing crew of two had taken many groups out onto the ocean waters to go deep-sea fishing. They had weathered these waves many times before. But this day would be different. What interrupted the plans and the routines of that day was death, sorrow, disbelief and shock. The darkness of that moment came rushing into the lives of the family and the friends who were close to Sigmund. Pastor Walther said something in his sermon at Sig’s funeral that really stuck in my heart. He reminded us that death is our constant enemy day in and day out, every moment of every day. I was reminded of course of the Romans 8:36 passage that quotes David in the Psalms, “For your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” That’s a dark scary thought, but it is very true. We never know when an accident, a sickness, a genetic disorder will take over and then death overtake us. Anyway, Pastor Walther went on to say that Sig’s life was interrupted by death. An interesting choice of words. His life was only interrupted you see, because those who die in the faith already live the life of one who has been promised eternal life. Death is only an interruption of a life that is eternal in Christ.

You see, as Christians, God has given us the “light of knowledge.” That means, that He has come to shed some light on our dark situation. Listen again to this very powerful verse in II Corinthians 4:6, “For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” First of all, Paul is pointing us back to creation when our Creator spoke the Word, “Let there be light”

and there was light. This same God who made light itself, now makes light shine in our hearts. And what exactly is this light He made shine in our hearts? Well, He goes on to say, that this light “gives us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Let’s unpack that a little bit. What knowledge is this? It is the saving knowledge that comes to us from the Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, through faith. We have the knowledge of God’s glory, which He promises us “in the face of Christ.” It is there in that face, in that person of Christ that we have the wisdom of God. Paul wrote in His first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God...It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” When we see the face of Christ, when we think in our minds about Christ, we see and know God’s glory, we see our salvation, our redemption. Jesus is our Light that has come into our sinful darkness and by His glorious grace through faith God has made this knowledge shine in our hearts.

Let me demonstrate. [*Here is where you open the box—while opening the box say:*] Jesus was sent as a light into this dark world. And what did this light come to do. He came to reveal to us the light of His salvation and glory. He came to take away the blackness of our sin [*point to the black square behind the heart*], by becoming sin on the cross, and he came to make this knowledge of God’s saving glory to shine in our hearts. [*Point to the heart*] God’s glory was fully displayed through the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross [*point out the cross the unfolded box had made*]. Notice what happens when you add light to all of this as God has told us in His Word. [*light the face of Jesus with the flood light*] Listen again and look at this special cross as I read that passage once again. “For God said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ So now that God has given you the knowledge of His glory in the face of Christ and He has made this light to shine in your hearts, what are we to do with it? .” [*turn off that hot light*].

Listen to verse 11, “For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.” This verse is referring to His resurrected life. To borrow Pastor Walther’s words, here is the greater interruption. You see, where sin, evil and death interrupt our relationship with God, His resurrection interrupts our final enemy death. This was the good news preached at Sigmund Bohnet’s funeral. You see, God’s promise of resurrection interrupts death once and for all. This interruption of life is greater than temporal death in that its victory will last forever.

God is asking us now to take this light he has made to shine in our hearts and carry it in this body in which we are now living in such a way that the resurrection of Jesus is revealed. He wants all to know about the glorious resurrection He promises to all who believe in Him. Just like our text says, “We who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake,” but this light of salvation in Jesus Christ, this knowledge about God’s glorious resurrection that awaits for all who believe in Him is to “be revealed in our mortal body,” here and now. We reveal the resurrection of Jesus to others when we let that light He has given us shine in and through us in what we say and what we do. When people look at our lives [*turn on the light behind the face of Christ one more time*] they should see the face of Christ. When they see our mortal hearts, they need to see Jesus, resurrected and eternal. By the way, this copy of Jesus face is from a famous painting of the resurrected Christ. May the light of the salvation you have in Jesus Christ which God has made shine in your hearts be revealed in your life today and throughout all the days to come. Amen

Deterding Sermon # 2

7th SUNDAY OF EASTER

Text: John 17:11b-12

Theme: “Kept in God’s Name”

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus

Christ. Amen

Sunday with visual: [Hold up the visual and ask] When you look at this what do you see? Do you see something special about this name I’m holding up? Of course we can see that it is the name Jesus in white letters on a green background. But have you actually seen this somewhere before? This is actually a model, a replica of some of the Viacom billboards you may have spotted throughout the St. Louis area.

Saturday without the visual: Have you ever seen those billboards in the St. Louis area that have a green background and have across the entire billboard big white letters that spells out the name Jesus?

[Put sign on communion rail]

I’ve always been curious about how people have responded to those signs when they see them. I don’t know what you think of those signs, but my first thought was that it could be a very powerful outreach tool. Think of the people that have seen that sign and have talked about it with family, friends and neighbors. For those who have not been in active in a church in awhile, a sign like that would really get you to thinking. It’s a reminder to Christians who see those signs to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Of course, being a Pastor, I began wondering who sponsored those billboards and is this just in the St. Louis area and how did it all begin. For such a simple sign, it sure contains a powerful message. Actually, it displays a powerful name. No other name on earth has the power of this name.

Our text speaks of the power of the name that Jesus was given by His Father. The NIV reads, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me...” I found it interesting that this version of the Bible inserts the words “by the power” to the original text. But indeed in the context of the entire New Testament there is power in this name given to Jesus—power to keep, guard or protect His disciples, those who follow Him.

Jewish prisoners in Nazi Germany dreaded the name Hitler. There was power revealed in this name, an evil power that sought the elimination of the entire Jewish nation. Those words, “Hiel Hitler,” conjured up a man who desired nothing but doom and destruction for the Jews and anyone who sympathized with them. But there was a name among the Jews that also carried power. They knew the name of someone who could guard, protect and keep them safe from Hitler’s doom and destruction. That name was Schindler. Schindler became a savior for many Jews. PBS online writes of the one named Schindler: “His factory became a safe haven for his Jewish workers. He used his connections to blunt every Nazi action that threatened his Jewish workers... When the Nazis demanded that all Jews in his area were to be sent to Auschwitz, Schindler began bargaining to move his factory to the Polish-Czechoslovakian border. He was allowed to draw up an “essential list” of Jewish workers whom he could take with him... When

word spread that there was a list, everyone prayed to be on it. With the help of a friend, he drafted a list of over 1,000 names.” Those on that list were kept and protected under this man’s name. Schindler was a powerful man and to be one of the essential workers listed under this name promised hope and salvation from sure doom and death.

SUNDAY ONLY: [Pick up the billboard model again] So what does this name reveal to you? What do we see in this name Jesus.

SATURDAY ONLY: So what does that name Jesus reveal to us? What do we see, when we see the name Jesus?

It reveals to us the one who can keep, protect and save us from sure doom, destruction and death. Jesus was praying to His Father to keep and protect the disciples and His followers by His name, the name God had given Him. Jesus indeed watched over the disciples and protected them while He was with them in this world. He prays, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.” Those who are truly in that name are those who believe on that name. Those who trust in the Word of God, in His revelation of forgiveness, life and salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus will be kept and protected by that name.

[Put down the name]

But what about the one who had been lost? Jesus goes on to pray, “None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.” It is obvious that Jesus is talking about Judas, predicting his coming fate. Jesus foreknew the events that were about to take place. He knew that Judas would choose to abandon Him and go His own way. Jesus, nor God the Father chose Judas for destruction. Judas brought this on himself, choosing to serve self rather than trust in the one who had offered protection and life.

We too have made choices that have caused doom and destruction not only in our own life but in the lives of others. Choices that deserve present and eternal punishment. We are no longer one with Jesus when we are not living as children of God, we have gone our own sinful way. We have made some very destructive choices. These come in all kinds of packages—sexual immorality, gambling, drinking, taking drugs, fighting, gossiping, backstabbing, getting revenge, hating one another and being hated. Then there are those little harmless lies, the borrowing with no intent to return, the breaking of the law just a little, the putting our own interests before that of others. We make all kinds of choices that abuse, pollute and dirty the name of Jesus in our lives. It’s as though we have sprayed graffiti, or shot holes in and even torn down the sign in our lives.

Jesus pointed directly at one of those doom and destruction choices we make in our lives. He calls upon His Father to protect them by his name, “so that they may be one as we are one.” Disunity is one of the most destructive forces in the church. It is very destructive to our witness of Jesus name. We are not only divided on issues in our own families, communities and congregations, but even our church body has been divided on issues that has caused hurt, pain, public disgrace and division within the church rather than walking together in the name of Jesus.

Like I had said, I was curious about those Jesus billboards popping up around St. Louis and so I investigated. I discovered that these signs were sponsored by a project. You’ll find them on the web at jesusnameproject.org. The story goes that some Christians who were gathered for Bible Study and were studying the Book of Acts back in 1998, discovered two major facts with respect to the Name of Jesus. First, was the incredible power available to his followers through the faith-filled use of His Name. The second they discovered was the recurring opposition to the

use of His Name. Just as he had been violently opposed during his earthly ministry, so too, were his post ascension followers as they used His Name.

So the purpose of the signs they said is this: No other name in history sparks more inspiration (for those who follow Him) or opposition (by those who choose not to follow Him) as the Name of Jesus. Our desire is to confront and inspire everyone with the powerful Name of Jesus. As we obey, we trust the Holy Spirit to do his work in people's hearts.

[Pick up the name]

This Bible Study group surely understood the power of this name Jesus, this name given to Him by His Father. The Bible has plenty to say about the name Jesus and what is revealed to us about this name. In Acts 4:10 we read, "Know this...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." In John 14 Jesus says "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." In Philippians 2, Paul writes, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth." In Romans 10:13, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." There is power in this name. The power is found in the work of Jesus who died and rose to save us from doom and destruction.

[Put down the name]

Tomorrow, this morning, Savannah Hope was baptized into the name of Jesus. Today God has begun His work in her through the gifts of faith and the Holy Spirit. Through His word Savannah along with all of us who have been baptized have been connected to the family of God through His Word connected with the water. In that holy name of God we receive forgiveness and new life. Through baptism into this name God is guarding, protected and keeping us in the one true faith.

When we come to the Lord's table we are strengthened in Jesus Christ through His very body and blood. Through His forgiveness, salvation and life He protects us and guards us from the doom and destruction that comes from sin, death and the devil.

SUNDAY ONLY: Take another look at this billboard model. Again, what do you see? I see a U in Jesus. You are in Jesus. Because of God's gifts of faith and baptism, you are in Christ and He is in you at work by His Spirit.

SATURDAY ONLY: Think again about the name Jesus. When you look at those letters what do you see? I see a U in Jesus. You are in Jesus and He is in you. Because of God's gifts of faith and baptism, you are in Christ and He is in you at work by His Spirit.

Think of life as a billboard. When people look at your life what do they see? Do they see that Jesus stands out in your life? Like those billboards with Jesus on them, we strengthened by God's grace to be living billboards for Jesus. When people look at us and our lives, do they see Jesus and His power at work there? Do we live our lives in the confidence of our faith that clings to the forgiveness we have through the death of Jesus and the new hope and life we have in the resurrection of Jesus? You are in Jesus. Through His forgiveness and gift of salvation given to us through faith we can see Jesus at work in us by His Spirit.

SUNDAY ONLY: Take one last look at this billboard model and see if you can see something else in that name Jesus. I see the letters U-S. It's the word us.

SATURDAY ONLY: Think of the name Jesus one more time in your mind. Is there something else you can see in that name Jesus. I see the letters U-S. It's the word us.

God wants us to be one together in Jesus. God desires that all of us are together in this same Spirit, unified into the Christian family.

[Put down the name]

This desire for us is found in Ephesians 4, where Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called into one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father all, who is over all and through all and in all." And again I Corinthians 12, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

By the grace of God and the power of His Spirit at work in us, we can live daily for Him. Colossians 3:17 encourages us, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the NAME of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." This was the Metro-East Lutheran High School's 2003 Graduating Class Bible verse. They were sent from high school into the future with this verse that tells us to live in the name of Jesus.

[Pick up the name]

By this name which keeps us, watches over and protects us, we too are sent to live as people forgiven and strengthened by God's grace to live our lives in word and deed, all in the name of Jesus. Amen

[Put the name of the empty plant stand under the hymn board to be seen for the rest of the service.]

Deterding Sermon # 3

4TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Text: Mark 4:26-29

Theme: "Ripe for Harvest"

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

[Hold the entire bundle of wheat up at this point.] The wheat harvest is one of the most nostalgic times of the year for me because it takes me back to the days of my childhood in Kansas. I've noticed that the wheat fields here are so small compared to those you will find out on the plains. When I was a child, I remember riding my bike out on the country roads of southwest Kansas. It was awesome to look across the wheat fields and see nothing but wheat as far as the eye can see. There were places where there were no fences, no phone poles, no houses or buildings, nothing but wheat as far as the eye could see. Here and there you may see a row of trees planted, a few grain elevators, but in some places even those were scarce. Those trees and elevators I imagined to be ships out on a sea of gold. It seems the wind is always blowing out on the plains and when the wind blows across those large fields the wheat those heads of grain move in such a way that they have the appearance of waves on an ocean. That's where the writer got the idea for the lyric, "for amber waves of grain." There was one summer where I actually got to drive a grain truck and combine. Yeah, I really enjoyed this time of year in Kansas. It was amazing to watch the landscape change from a dismal and empty looking no-man's land into a lush green and then golden land of wheat. [Pull out one of the stalks of wheat.]

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a stalk of grain, like a stalk of wheat. [Hold up the single stalk while reading the passage.] Jesus says in our gospel reading, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed...All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."

[On Saturday point to each part as I mention it.]

Jesus says the kingdom is like a seed that produces a stalk...a head on the stalk...and then in the head [pull out some of the grains] the full kernel in the head. And here we can see some of those kernels of grain. This is the fruit of the plant which by the way, is a primary source for one of our four major food groups—grain and bread products. It is a food that brings nourishment and life to our bodies. Along with other foods we eat, these grains of wheat along with others help us grow physically healthy and strong. The kingdom of God as a kingdom of growth is the primary point Jesus is making in this parable. [Put down the visual and walk away.]

Jesus told many parables about the "kingdom of God." What exactly is He talking about when He is talking about this kingdom. Is He talking about heaven? Is He talking about the Church on earth and heaven? Just where do we find this kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is definitely found in heaven. For there God rules as King perfectly over those who will live with Him in that heavenly kingdom forever. But God's kingdom also comes into our lives now, here in this world into our hearts through faith. In his explanation to the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "thy kingdom come," Luther writes, "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

You see, what Jesus is teaching us is that when we hear God's Word, the Holy Spirit is actually at work planting that Word in our hearts. God's Word is the seed and it is the very thing that will cause the seed to grow. What grows from the Word of God is faith, a life of faith.

Now, just like with a seed that grows into a plant we can't exactly see how it is growing but we do know who planted it and is giving it the power to grow. Jesus said in our text, "Night and day, whether the man sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain..." We know that our faith does not grow all by itself. But to see how it is actually being grown by the Spirit is another story. We can't visibly see how God's Word is making our faith grow in our hearts, we can't visibly see the Holy Spirit that is causing the growth to occur, but we can see the effects of it; we can see the actual growth in the stalk and the head, we can see the fruit of faith, the grain and how one is growing by what they say and do.

SATURDAY

[Hold up a single stalk again.] Just like this stalk of wheat. When we first saw it in its early stages of growth in the field we saw it as a green shoot. From a distance it looked like a blade of grass. Then it began to grow a stalk and finally the head fully appeared. As the head grew, we can see that individual grains were growing in the head. As the sun beat down on it, the entire plant began to change to a golden color, ready for harvest. [Lay the wheat down.]

SUNDAY

Just like a stalk of wheat you would see in a wheat field. When you look at it in the early stages of growth in the field, you see it as a green shoot. From a distance it looks like a blade of grass. Then it began to grow a stalk and finally the head fully appeared. As the head grew, we can see that individual grains were growing in the head. As the sun beat down on it, the entire plant began to change to a golden color, ready for harvest.

What does Jesus want us to walk away with from this parable? He wants us to know that the seed of God's Word planted in our hearts is just the starting point of a lifetime of faith. This faith embraces the truth that Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life, the one whose very body was broken for us in His suffering and death on the cross and is even now truly presented to us in the bread at Holy Communion. This bread we eat, made from the grains of the field and which is used in our Lord's meal nourishes our spiritual lives and causes our faith to grow, producing fruit and preparing us for the harvest.

Big corporations that want to grow, know that their workers need to continually be updated on the latest technological advances. So they send them to conferences, workshops and classes to study and to learn more to advance their growth. Those who have a pilot's license know that you have to continually actually fly a plane a specific number of hours to keep that license. They need to continually practice flying a plane so that they can grow in their skills as a pilot. Some pilots of major airlines are required to take refresher courses and learn about new advancements made on the planes they fly. For most professionals, no matter what field of work you are in, if you want to grow beyond what you have learned, you have to study and practice in order to grow more knowledgeable and to become more productive in your field.

The same goes with our faith. The Holy Spirit helps us to grow in our faith. By the Spirit's power we continue to study God's Word. We put our faith into practice through studying the Bible, attending worship to hear the Word preached and to receive the sacraments for our nourishment. God not only leads us to study and grow in our faith, He also produce the fruit.

Remember how Jesus says that once the grain is ripe then comes the harvest? So just when is harvest time? It is the time when God will come and bring you home. That is why the Day of Judgment, the Final Day of this world is referred to as the day of harvest, especially in a number

of parables told by Jesus. The prophets of the Old Testament alluded to that final day as a day of harvest. Even in John's Revelation, the last day is referred to as a day of harvest.

"As soon as the grain is ripe," Jesus said, "he puts a sickle to it, because the harvest has come." Once we have grown in the faith God will determine when we are ripe and are ready for the sickle. He will gather His harvest when He is ready to bring us home. That day of harvest will be when we have either breathed our last in this world or when Christ comes again in His glory. We know that when Christ comes again, the harvest, those faith grew and became ripe will be gathered together and brought into his kingdom forever.

[On Saturday, hold up the entire bundle of wheat again as you conclude.]

So as you drive around and see the fields of wheat, either ready to be harvested or already harvested, remember how Christ has compared the kingdom of God to the stalks of grain in those fields. Remember how through the power of the Holy Spirit and His Word and sacraments he makes faith grow in our hearts, and how that growth produces fruit in our lives and ripens us for the harvest. May the Holy Spirit continue to cause our lives of faith to grow as we ripen for that final and great day of Harvest. Amen

Dr. Glenn Nielsen preached the following three sermons.

Nielsen Sermon # 1

INI

Ephesians 2:19-22
Building the church

July 24, 2003
Pentecost 6

Goal: that the hearers trust more in God's building the Church

Dear Friends in Christ:

God is building His church. He is fitting the pieces together. The whole building is joined together to become His dwelling place, His holy temple.

My son Tim built me this Lego house. Notice how nice and square the sides are. The walls are strong and sturdy. Everything fits together just right. A good model of how God is putting together His church.

And we are a part of this church. No longer are we outsiders. We have been fit in by God. No longer aliens or foreigners, this is our home. See this Lego piece – that's you. (Do a couple of more times by name?)

Except something's wrong with this model. It's not the way the Church actually looks. I built some other walls that more accurately reflect the state of the church.

Here's one that has bricks going all over the place. Holes in the wall. Some fit in the wrong way. Pointing in the wrong direction. Not many joining together just right with this wall. Just like the church. A voter's meeting needs to decide what to do with a big gift of money. Some want to redecorate the church, others say give it to missions, the pastor wants better salaries for the church staff. A big fight and some leave the church angry. The Catholic Church is rocked by scandals because of the sexual abuse of children by some of her priests. TV evangelists bring shame to the church by their sordid money and sex stories. Church members live lives that are just as sinful as those who don't go to church. And certainly the Missouri Synod's fighting for decades hasn't shown much unity either – Yankee Stadium, Christian News, politicking for office, Internet chat rooms that rip and shred people's reputations. Not much of a wall.

Or here's a wall that's barely been built. Churches dying, losing members. The Mission department of the LC-MS has brought home many of its missionaries due to the lack of money. Support staff are gone. It's tough to build the church when your mission department is stripped down to bare bones. Same is true for Lutheran Hour Ministries. But then we hear how Islam and Mormonism are growing rapidly. The church seems to have fewer and fewer pieces for God to join together. Not much of a wall.

Or how about this one? I have to handle it carefully because it's barely attached to the church. Many people and churches have almost lost connection to Jesus. Some denominations are ordaining openly homosexual priests, pastors and bishops. Others are performing same sex weddings. Some churches sound more like political action committees than places of worship. Enough.

The church doesn't look so good anymore does it? And we're a part of this? Doesn't look like something God would be building. Makes you wonder who's really in charge here.

But there's more to this Lego building than just the walls. I had my son build this house with certain special features.

First, you had to have noticed the big white corner. The chief cornerstone is Jesus Christ our Lord. The most important piece to Church is Jesus. Wherever He is, there the Church will be.

Wherever Jesus is, there you want to be. Whatever is built upon Jesus, you want to be a part of.

Why? Well, here's another special feature I had Tim build into this model of the church. The foundation is the cross of Christ. When Paul says the prophets and apostles are the foundation he's simply referring to their one clear message – Christ crucified and risen for us.

For example, one day, when Jesus was walking with his disciples, he asked them, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus told him he was right and that on this rock, this confession, this foundation, the church would be built.

Jesus the Christ. The one who would give His life for the church. The One who would bring us into the Church through baptism and the Word. The One who would die to forgive this new creation for all these strange looking walls. The One who would rise from the dead to send His Holy Spirit to this holy temple. The One whose cross and empty tomb assures us that we will meet God with His love and mercy in this place called the Church.

One cornerstone. One foundation. Jesus Christ our Lord.

And not just at the beginning, but for all time. One more special feature I had my son build into this model. The cross rises up through the building. It connects the walls to each other. It gives it stability and security. The people are built together around it. Jesus holds the church together. From bottom to top, from cornerstone to capstone, the church is God's holy temple because Jesus and His cross are in all the right places.

Yes, one church. A holy temple. A dwelling place for God. And when you look carefully, you can see how He's putting us together in His own special way.

Like with a baptism. Water and Word joined together. A child at the baptismal font. And then we welcome a new child of God into the Church because she has been marked as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

Or during the Lord's Supper. We call it Holy Communion. His body and blood. One Lord. United around Him and His salvation. One table. People of different ages, colors, backgrounds, nationalities, rich and poor are all joined together at the altar. One church.

Or when we say the Creed. The message of the prophets and apostles is still spoken loud and clear Sunday after Sunday. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord. Conceived, born, suffered, died, buried, rose, ascended, sits, comes again. I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints. Yes, the same foundation is heard over and over in the church, and the church is being fit together by God's good design.

And as for the walls, even they begin to look different because the cross runs through the church. Last Sunday, at Grace Chapel in north county, the congregation had just finished Vacation Bible School. For a special project, the kids collected money for Immanuel House, a ministry of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Argentina. This South American church is small, without much money, but is doing big things for the Lord. They work to keep kids off the streets, teach them life skills, give them a safe place to learn about Jesus. So the kids raised almost \$360 dollars to give to Immanuel House. Then they challenged the adults on Sunday morning to match their gift through a door offering.

A small house had been built to sit in the narthex with bricks covering the house to represent the kids' money they had given. Grace Chapel has three services. On Saturday night, the door offering filled the collection plate. SO on Sunday morning the challenge was that Saturday night had built an addition, now we need a second story. By the time we got to the third service we were talking about making it a mansion. And sure enough, almost \$900 had been given just on the spur of the moment. Hmmm. The church walls look pretty good in that spot. And stories like that one can be told for every congregation throughout the world, from every generation.

Look closely and you will see a holy temple being built by God. The foundation and cornerstone are in place. Jesus is here with His Holy Spirit. And it is good, every good, that we too are no longer aliens or strangers, but have been built into this wonderful dwelling place called the church. Amen.

Nielsen sermon # 2

Date Preached: July 12-13, 2003

Text: Mark Chapter 4

Theme: "Quieting the Storm"

Well, what's going on in this miracle? On the surface, it seems simple enough. Jesus and the disciples get into some boats, a big storm comes up. The disciples are afraid. Jesus quiets the storm. Simple enough. But there's more going on here. If you dive beneath the surface, you will find that there are two undercurrents that will pull you into this miracle and this miracle into your life. The first undercurrent has to do with the disciples. The disciples found themselves in a situation that was out of control, that was beyond what they could do. The second undercurrent had to do with Jesus, that Jesus is in the boat during the storm, and he's calling for faith. In the boat during the storm, and he's looking for faith. Those are the two undercurrents and we'll start with the one with the disciples.

Now, with this miracle the disciples, before they got in the boat, were tired. There had been teaching and ministry and healing. Jesus was welcoming and accepting anyone that would come to Him. They were going from town, to town, to town. There was barely enough time to eat, not enough sleep and they were tired. They needed some rest. In fact, shortly before this, Jesus' mother and brothers had come to try to take him home. They were worried about him. The disciples were tired. Then Jesus said, "Let's go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and now it looks like time for rest." They get into the boat, it's evening, and they start to go across the sea. Well, you can imagine the gentle rocking of the boat, the evening hour, they're tired, and many of them go to sleep. You've felt this; a hot, sunny day at a park or on the beach. Your tire, you get into the car, you start to drive home, and everybody falls asleep except for the driver, I hope. But you know that feeling, and there they are in the boat and they all fall asleep except for the one's sailing it, including Jesus, he falls asleep in the boat as well. Now, when they get out onto the sea, the Sea of Galilee that is noted for sudden violent storms. And those who are sailing the boat begin to notice that the wind begins to pick up. It has a cooler, a moister feel. The waves begin to move the boat more than it had in the past, and they're worried. They know what happens if you're in a little boat and you're too far from shore to get back safely. Mark says that there were other boats with Jesus, and so it's like a little convoy, a little flotilla going across this Sea of Galilee and the storm is coming. And sure enough, it's sudden, the moon gets blacked out, the wind picks up, the rain starts coming straight at their face and the waves are starting to swamp the boat. They're coming in over the sides and they are trying to bail it out, but it is a hopeless situation. This is a storm that is bigger than the disciples can handle. And that little convoy of boats, they're not together anymore. They're just begin scattered. Here is a situation that is out of control. There's nothing more they can do except Jesus is still asleep in the boat. It's a little hard to imagine. Everybody else is awake now, bailing out water, trying to sail, but Jesus is still asleep. So what do the disciples ? They wake him up. "Lord! Don't you care if we're going to drown?" And there's where we are pulled into the miracle. "Don't you care that we're going to drown?"

There are times in life, situations that have gone beyond our control, that we just can't do much about anymore. And you wonder, "Lord! Don't you care?" I can imagine a woman sitting at a kitchen table, have trouble with her children. There's strain in that relationship. Her

husband isn't much help. That relationship is rocky too. Her mother has Alzheimer's and now there has been a stroke as well. Her dad doesn't want to put her in a home, but have her spend more time helping to take care of them. And all the stresses and all the strains coming from all those different relationships in her home, and you can just hear her begin to say, "Lord! Don't you care? I'm drowning here." Or a man, driving home from work. It's late at night. There's been too many late nights. He's tired. There have been lay offs at work and more and more has been piled on his shoulders, but he doesn't want to complain because the company is not doing very well and he needs the job. There are lots of bills to be paid. And the family is struggling and he's not keeping up and he's tired. You can almost hear him say in the car, "Lord! Don't you care? I'm drowning here."

At the seminary, many of the students struggle with finances. Many of them have left jobs to come and become a pastor. And for those couple years, the husband who's studying at the seminary, maybe works ten to fifteen hours a week, and the wife is only going to be there for a couple years. They have children, so what work she has is not always that well paying. Well, at the seminary we have an auto repair shop that's about a mile away, and many of the faculty and the staff and students go there as well. And when I take our van or our car in, I will sometimes see tickets written up for two or three of the students, maybe a new transmission \$1,800, or engine repair of \$1,000, or new tires, hundreds. And I know they don't have that kind of money for those kind of car repairs. I can just imagine a student and his wife sitting with the checkbook between them wondering, "Lord! Don't you care? Here we are preparing to be pastors and we're drowning in these bills." Now, I'm not sure what the situation may be in your life, what comes. It might be an illness, or finances, or home, whatever the case may be. But there do come those moments where life is out of control, where you can't do much more about it. And what comes to your mind, what comes to your heart is, "Lord! Don't you care that we are drowning here?" That's that one undercurrent that pulls us right into this miracle.

The other undercurrent has to do with Jesus and what he does in this miracle. The disciples wake him up. And what he does is say a simple word, "Quiet, be still," and the wind it just disappears. The rain evaporates in the mid-air, the waves are calmed and it's silent except for the boat gently lapping in the water and then the occasional sob of the person who was so afraid just a minute ago. And in the quiet of that miracle, Jesus says, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Jesus is in the boat during the storm and he's calling for faith. In my office, I have a picture someone gave to me at Immanuel, St. Charles, when I was a pastor there. It is a picture of this miracle. And the waves are swamping the boat and the mast is broken, and the disciples are almost buried under the water and the faces that you can see are just terrified, and Jesus is standing at the end of the boat. He is about ready to say, "Quiet, be still." But you look at this painting and you say, "Why did the artist paint it at that moment when the storm was at its worst and before Jesus has said anything? It's to remind us that when life is out of control, or we can't do anything more about it, when we're wondering the most if he cares, he's in the boat with us during the storm. He's not on the shore where it's safe, He's not just secluded up in heaven. But he's in the boat during the storm and he's calling for faith. What did the disciples do after this miracle was over? They're still afraid. Only this time, not at the wind and the waves. This time they're afraid of Jesus. Isn't that surprising? They're afraid of Jesus because now they suddenly realize that they're in the presence of someone really amazing. Who is so awesome that even the wind and the waves obey him? Who is this one that he can control what we altogether had no power over? Well, they were going to find out in just a short time who this

was. Only this time, the storm happened over land instead of sea. This time it was in Jerusalem. Once again, it had been a busy week. Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem. There was teaching. He raised Lazarus from the dead, cleaned out the temple. It was a busy week, and on Thursday, it was time for some rest and quiet. And they had a Passover meal and then Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. It's a nice, quiet time until the soldiers arrive. And the storm breaks. He's arrested. There were vicious attacks. He is whipped. A crown of thorns, ferocious rejection by the elders and the trial and Jesus is on the cross. Who is this? This time it's not the one who is going to control the wind and the waves. This time it is someone who is going to show his power over what really is beneath the surface of that miracle. What is beneath the surface of that miracle is sin and death. It is sin that brings those moments to light, with sickness and death, or family problems. Or relationship troubles, or financial difficulties. That's what's beneath the surface. And what Jesus is doing is taking control of that deeper problem of sin and death. And when he's on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He is bringing forgiveness for the sin that has brought those moments in life that are so out of control. He is bringing victory over death! For on the third day, he rises from the dead. He speaks the word "quiet" and sin and death are silenced. He speaks the word, "be still," and our fears begin to evaporate and our faith is strengthened. Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him. He is Jesus, the Savior stronger even than sin and death that seeps below the surface. And He's calling for faith. And here is where we are pulled into the miracle again. There will be times when we sit and simply want to pray, "Lord, don't you care?" But to the situations at home where things may not be going so well, Jesus wants that prayer to change to, "Lord, I know you care. Help me believe." And he lifts you up to see that there is another family called the Church, where there is support, encouragement and help, and the table where you come to receive the very body and blood of Jesus to show you that he is in the boat, during the storm with you. Or when someone is sick, or death is near or has happened, you may want to pray, "Lord, don't you care?" but he's calling for us to believe, to change that prayer to, "Lord I know you care. Help me to see." And he opens your eyes to see that there is more than an illness, more than a coffin, that there is life and a resurrection from the dead because of him.

And for a student at a seminary, yes the temptation is there to say, "Lord, don't you care?" But he is calling him to change that prayer to, "Lord I know you care, Help me to see."

Now may the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep our hearts and our minds filled with that faith that sees Jesus in those moments as the one who cares. Amen

“Adoption Papers”

The Bible passage for this morning’s message is Romans 8:14-16 particularly and there’s one word in here that has a couple meanings depending on which translation you use. When I get to it, well, it’s the word “son-ship” which also has the meaning “adoption.” Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you do not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you receive the spirit of “adoption.” And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Dear Friends in Christ, in one of my summer classes at the seminary I have a student who grew up in Israel. He’s a Palestinian and amazingly when he was growing up, the family lived in a Jewish neighborhood. As he became older, he came over to the United States. He became a Lutheran, attended Concordia Seminary a number of years back and is now a pastor in South Dakota. One of his memories of growing up in Israel is listening to a little neighbor girl welcoming her dad home after work. She knew when he would be walking up the street and when she saw him, she cried out, “Ema Abba ba, Ema, Abba ba.” Then she would dash out the door, and run down the street and he would scoop her up into his arms and they would walk into the house together. What a wonderful scene. You could picture it, the closeness, the warmth and the tenderness and love, a child and her dad. But just what was the little girl saying when she cried out, “Ema Abba ba.” Ema is the word for mommie and abba the word for daddy and ba is coming. Mommie, Daddy’s coming, Mommie, Daddy’s coming! But I suspect that most of you already knew what the work abba meant. We’ve heard it numerous times in church when those portions of the Bible are read just like Romans 8. Abba, Father, Daddy. Not much has changed in the last 2,000 years. The Apostle Paul writes that God is our Abba, our Father and we are his children, the same relationship as theirs, close and warm and tender. Family, home all wrapped up together in Abba, Father. But that relationship of Abba and child that we have with God doesn’t come naturally. The only begotten Son is Jesus. We, on the other hand, needed to be adopted into God’s family. The reason is as old as Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve did that act of disobedience, they were kicked out of the house, kicked out of the Garden of Eden. And ever since, people have been born into that disobedience, that sinfulness. King David, the great king from the Old Testament wrote a heart-rending song after he had committed adultery and plotted murder, he simply says, “Surely, I was born in sin, sinful from the time I was conceived in my mother’s womb. And he’s right. The rest of the Bible simply testifies that from the start of life, we are spiritual orphans, spiritually homeless. We have no right to call God our Abba because of the sinfulness that’s in our lives. And that’s the way everything would stay if it weren’t for God’s love, if He wouldn’t do what it takes to make us His adopted children. Everything changes because God’s love opens up his arms wide to welcome us home as his adopted sons and daughters. We heard how that happened with the Gospel reading earlier. A Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus comes at night. He admits that Jesus is someone special. No one can do the things you’re doing unless God had sent you. And then Jesus has those words, “I tell you, no one will see the kingdom of God unless that person is born again.” And now Nicodemus is confused. How can somebody go back into a mother’s womb? But Jesus isn’t referring to going back to that sinful start when we were born as spiritual orphans and spiritually

homeless, the beginning of our life when we had no right to call God Abba, because of our sinfulness. No, Jesus is telling Nicodemus and He's telling us that there is only one way to see the kingdom of God, only one way to enter into God's family. And that is when the son of man, Jesus himself, is lifted up on the cross so that anyone and everyone who believes will receive eternal life. Do you see how the adoption works? We need it because of our sinfulness. God's love sends Jesus, the one and only begotten Son goes to the cross to forgive our sinfulness. We are born again by water and the Spirit, Jesus says and God is our Abba, Father. We are brought into an eternal home, warmth and tenderness and love and family all because of God's love in Jesus Christ. Our adoption is handled by Jesus. Adoption!

My wife, Sue and I have friends who live down in Cape Girardeau. They are foster parents. A number of years back they received two children into their home, a young boy and a small girl. Both of the children had been abused, one of them violently shaken. So they were taken out of their biological parents home and placed with our friends as foster children. The boy is now almost a teenager, but he will never play baseball or give a Father's Day card. When he was shaken, it left him severely brain damaged and his arms and legs are all curled up and he's confined to a wheelchair and the bed. The little girl's abuse has left her blind and autistic. She will not come running out of the house saying, "Mommy, Daddy's home." You know what our friends want to do? They want to adopt these two children as their own. They want to make them a son and a daughter, a family. Now whose love is making this happen? Who's going to make this family act. The parents are. The parents are. And the same is true for us in our relationship with God. Born spiritually homeless and orphans, no right to call God, he is the one who will make that adoption happen and he does it through Jesus Christ and he changes everything. Our adoption is handled by Jesus. And in that adoption, we call God, "Abba, Father." That Pastor from South Dakota mentioned that he is ministering to a man that lives in the community where his church is at. The man's name is Tom and Father's Day does not have much meaning for him because the alcohol has messed up his life. When the Pastor went to visit Tom in his home, the family dog walked on by, and the dog's name was Worthless. Can you imagine naming your dog worthless? But you know what's even sadder? That's the same name the man has given himself, Worthless. And it's the same thing his two daughters call him. No respect from his children, barely a part of this home. He simply sees himself as worthless. The Pastor says that he's been making some progress with Tom, that he's standing up a little bit straighter and wearing nicer clothes. How was this happening? One day he brought Tom to church, invited Tom to come and talk to him. And they walked into the sanctuary and he stood Tom right beneath the cross, and then he told him of how Jesus has given his life for him. That he is not worthless, but because of Jesus he is worth everything in God's eyes and Tom cried. He cried. Now that I can imagine, can't you? Because that's what happened to us. People who had no right to call God Abba Father and we are adopted into his family because of Jesus Christ. We are his children and he is our Abba Father, all because we too have come beneath the cross. For most of us, we came beneath the cross at our baptism. Water was splashed onto our forehead and we, who were spiritually homeless, born into sin, were born again into God's family. That Pastor reached into the water and spoke the name that is above all names, our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and we were adopted right at that moment. We were given the privilege, the precious, precious privilege of calling God Abba Father. We are his children, adopted into his forever family, his eternal home.

Another Pastor in that class I'm teaching is from Arizona, says he doesn't put any of his

academic diplomas on his office wall. What he hangs there instead, are his adoption papers. Now he is not adopted like those foster children will be for our friends. His mom and dad are his biological parents. No, what he's talking about is his baptismal certificate. Those adoption papers are the certificate he received on his baptismal day because on that day he was born again into God's family, sins forgiven and God became his Abba Father. That's the witness to his entrance into God's family. That's a wonderful idea. I decided to do it myself. This past week I had Sue frame my baptismal certificate. On December 25, 1955, water was splashed on my head. On that day, the Holy Spirit through that water (Jesus says by water and the Spirit) on that day the Holy Spirit worked through that water and the word of the triune God, and brought me into God's family. And ever since, I've been calling God Abba Father.

Most of you have a baptismal certificate at home as well. Perhaps you could take it out this week, put it on the mantle, on the kitchen table, hang it on the wall, take it to work with you. And when you're feeling spiritually homeless, or you're not quite sure how God fits into your life, look at that baptismal certificate because God is you Abba Father and you are his children forever. Amen.

Rev. Terry Grebing preached the following two sermons.

Grebing sermon # 1

“Bowled Over”

Zion: July 27, 2003

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

From September of 1961 through May of 1970, I attended Trinity Lutheran School in Cape Girardeau. The school basement featured a six-lane bowling alley. The bowling pin that I am holding (left in my office) originated from that bowling alley. I received this pin as a prize during a bowling activity when I was in 8th grade. The magic marker inscription states: “Boys High Game Terry Grebing 167 2-8-70.”

Now. Beyond what I just shared, I don’t know the history of this particular pin. However, judging by its battered condition, this bowling pin must have suffered from repeated abuse. During its career, this pin certainly must have been in variety of positions ranging from the headpin to the tenpin. Always in the line of fire, this pin up without the assistance of human hands or automatic pinsetters.

As we hear this description, it sounds a lot like our human condition, doesn’t it? I mean, all too often, we seem to be bowled over by life. For, throughout our earthly lives, we are situated in a variety of positions, always in the line of fire, always vulnerable, always helpless and unable to stand up by ourselves.

Now. Turning to our text, if ever there were a candidate for a human bowling pin, St. Paul would have to be the kingpin. To explain, St. Paul refers to a “thorn in the flesh” he had been given. While bible scholars speculate that this “thorn” may have been eye misery, migraine headaches, malaria, epilepsy, or leprosy, God’s Word never identifies the precise nature of his ailment.

While the nature of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” remains a mystery, obviously, our own personal thorns in the flesh are well known to us. These “thorns” may include traumatic experiences, debilitating disease, chronic pain, and painful break-ups.

Adding to our anxiety is our ultimate “thorn in the flesh”: our sinful human nature. In that regard, while I bowled a 167 game on February 8th, 1970, on July 18, 2003, when I went bowling with my family in Cape Girardeau, my highest score was 138, almost 30 pins worse over 33 years later. Plus, the other night in Bethalto, one game I bowled a 188, another game my score was 108.

These personal insights reveal a universal fact: in bowling, everyone is inconsistent as well as imperfect. And by nature, the same thing holds true in life. Each of us must lament along with St. Paul in Romans chapter 7, “What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.”

Going back to our text, as a result of Paul’s intense battles with his “thorn in the flesh,” this exasperated apostle pleaded with the Lord three times, “Take it away!” But the Lord didn’t. And by the same token, as we struggle with our own thorns in the flesh, the Lord may ignore our pleas to “Please take them away!”

After being knocked down again and again as a result of ongoing personal battles. We feel like a bowling pin that has taken one to many hits. Worse yet, we may feel abandoned by God.

But the Good News: Whenever we are bowled over by life’s problems or our own failures,

we can take heart because we are bowled over by grace! As we are poked and prodded by various “thorns in the flesh,” Jesus Christ assures us along with St. Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

To illustrate the significance of God’s grace, occasionally, automatic pinsetters include a red pin in the mix. At many bowling alleys, if the red pin happens to be the headpin, any bowler getting a strike receives a free gift: a free game.

When Jesus Christ shed His blood on Calvary’s cross, He played the part of a Red Headpin. As He bore our sins in His body, the full brunt of God’s anger over sin struck Him head-on. The toppling of this unique red Headpin in death resulted in a free gift of life for us. For when death struck Jesus head-on, it produced a split: a positive split! The curtain of the temple being split in half symbolized the total destruction of the spiritual barrier between a perfect God and sinful human beings.

Simply stated, a head-on collision that occurs in a bowling alley creates a 7-10 split that is virtually impossible to convert into a spare. But the head-on collision that occurred on Calvary resulted in a perfect split that “spared” us from a totally impossible situation: the agony of eternal destruction.

After allowing Himself to be knocked down by death, our Heavenly Kingpin picked Himself up and returned to life. And now, He lives to pick us up, lifting our spirits whenever we are down and out. And He does so in a highly personal manner. In that regard, in a few weeks, on August 24, we are going to have our annual congregational picnic on church grounds. Following our noon meal, we will be involved in lots of outdoor activities, including bowling. Unlike modern-day lanes with automatic pinsetters, any bowling pins knocked down on this retro-lane must be set up manually, one at a time.

Whenever we are knocked down by adversity or guilt, the same Lord who’s got the whole world in His hands gently lifts us up and carefully sets us down individually, one at a time. As the Lord puts us back on our feet with His daily forgiveness and strength, He makes us ready for another day as He offers us a new lease on life.

As a result of that “personal touch”, we, along with St. Paul, find ourselves bowled over with gratitude! At all times, we can express our gratitude by demonstrating a five-pin mentality. (Stand in center of chancel, assuming the position of a “five pin” and gesturing to indicate surrounding pins as I talk). To illustrate, the battered bowling pin that I am holding (left in my office) must have been the five pin on many occasions. The five pin is positioned in a direct line behind the headpin, surrounded by two pins immediately in front, one pin on each side, and four pins in the back.

Allowing the five pin to represent us, the headpin to represent Jesus Christ, the two pins immediately behind the headpin to represent Word and Sacrament, and the remaining six pins to represent our fellow Christians, we discover an uplifting reminder that we can take home with us.

“If we remain focused on Christ as our Head by staying connected to Word and Sacrament and surrounding ourselves with brother and sisters in Christ, we can’t help but remain ‘bowled over by God’s grace’ and ‘bowled over with gratitude!’” Amen.

“Robed In Righteousness: I’m Ready”

Zion: May 25, 2003

Text: Isaiah 61:10

1. After a brief delay following message hymn, appear in pulpit in bathrobe.

“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.”

You’re probably wondering why I’m dressed this way. Well, during my early years in the ministry, whenever I had a bunch of things due by a certain deadline, I had many panic-filled dreams featuring either a science test for which I failed to study, or a science project that I failed to complete.

More recently, that science test dream has evolved into a church service dream. In my mind, it is almost time for church to start, and I’m sitting in my office in a bathrobe. I hear the opening hymn being sung and the liturgy being conducted and the message hymn in full swing, but I can’t seem to get with it. I keep getting delayed, never quite making it into the sanctuary. Just as I start to hit the panic button, I wake up. The next day, I’m ready to go. I get busy, nice and early.

Today, I have a deeper fear than missing a deadline. My greater fear as a pastor is that members of my flock won’t be prepared for the ultimate deadline: the Last Day.

I’m going to address that fear with a series of wardrobe changes. After doing so, hopefully, each of us will be moved to declare: “Robed in Righteousness: I’m Ready!”

2. Appear in just a shirt and tie: Bible tie. (No coat)

As I stand before you right now, without a robe, you might consider my dress to be inappropriate. However, I could argue, “I don’t need a robe. I’m fine just the way I am.” After all, my pants are nearly pressed; my shirt is nice and clean; and my tie – well, my tie has a bunch of Bibles all over it. How much more appropriate can you get?

My unorthodox pulpit attire illustrates that, if we fail to wear the spiritual garment of Christ’s robe of righteousness, we are under dressed for salvation. While, on the basis of outer appearances, we may look pious, and act pious, and feel pious, we are anything but pious. “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Jesus reinforced that point in the parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22, when the man without wedding clothes was booted out and banished into outer darkness!

3. Clergy robe put on: Without any ornamentation.

Quite often, people will ask me, “Why do pastors in the Lutheran church wear a clergy robe?” The simple answer is: This white robe covers up a pastor’s personality so that members of the congregation see him, not as an individual man, but as Christ’s representative. Beyond that, the clergy robe is also a clear-cut reminder that Christ’s robe of righteousness covers up our imperfections.

Unfortunately, as we interject our own ideas into the mix, we may project the confusing image of a graduation gown. A graduation gown symbolized the merits of a hard-working student. As we proudly wear Christ’s robe of righteousness, if we trumpet our good works, we may soil and spoil that pure robe with the mistaken notion that our own merits help insure our salvation.

In the process, this pure robe of Christ’s righteousness resembles a Boy Scout uniform

covered from top to bottom with merit badges that we have awarded ourselves for church attendance, Bible Reading, clean living, loyalty to parents, and Christian service above and beyond the call of duty. Instead of saying, "Glory be to Thee, O Lord," this robe would be declaring, "Glory be to Thee plus me, O Lord," in direct contradiction to the fact that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

4. Clergy robe remains on: Add a pectoral cross to cover the heart.

This pectoral cross covering my heart demonstrates that our Risen Savior covers up our imperfections through a robe that He painstakingly stitched together through His perfect sacrifice on Calvary's cross. Yes, the Sinless One who wore a seamless robe of fabric has produced a seamless robe of righteousness for each of us. Galatians 3:27 refers to it when it says, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." As I clutch this cross, it demonstrates, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace."

5. Clergy robe remains on: Add a stole. Could somebody help me here?

The colorful stole that I am wearing is like a badge of the pastoral office. It resembles the towel that was draped around the neck of a servant performing the act of foot washing. As such, it may signify the fruit of righteousness displayed by Christians.

The fact that this stole was put on by somebody else helps us visualize that any and all good works are produced by the Holy Spirit, not by us. Plus, the fact that once in a while, I put on the wrong color of stole illustrates that we are often oblivious to the fact that we are doing good works. We are just "doing what comes naturally" according to our new nature in Christ.

Let's review. I am wearing a clergy robe, not street clothes, to demonstrate that we can't stand before God on our own merits because we have none. The pectoral cross that is not surrounded by merit badges reminds us that Christ alone covers up our imperfections. Only His merits count for salvation. The stole, put on by someone else, reminds us that the spirit alone produces good works as the fruit of faith.

And so, as you look at me right now, you see a visual reminder that, in Christ alone, we are well dressed for salvation; and we have every reason to join the prophet Isaiah in declaring, "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness!"

6. Back to the bathrobe. (Hold it up on a hanger).

Fortunately, I won't be wearing this in my dreams tonight. Having preached this sermon, I am confident that tonight, while I may be snoring like a buzz saw, I will also be sleeping like a baby. I am assured that, by God's grace, I and my listeners have gotten the message: The all-important message that, as we stand 100% on the Solid Rock of Jesus Christ and not one iota on the sinking sand of our own merits, we will be "clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne."

Therefore, may our daily attitude remain, "Robed in righteousness: I'm ready! I'm ready for the Lord when He is ready for me!" Amen.

The following sermon was preached by seminarian Daniel Borkenhagen.

“Being Brought Back Home”

Ezekiel 37 – Pentecost

June 8, 2003

Goal: That the hearers be settled by the Spirit as God brings them home.

(lay on side and say) “Woe to you Bunker Hill. Woe to you. (Pull out a skull.) Look at your dry bones.” (Start talking to the fields, etc.) Crazy Old Ezekiel. You see, the things just done before you were essentially repetitions of what the Ezekiel of our lesson today did throughout his ministry to Israel. He did some of the craziest things. He spent 390 days lying on his side in the middle of the city trying to show Israel that they were going to be defeated by other nations. He yelled at the mountains to tell Israel how bad it was going to be. He talked about dry bones, and the list goes on. Yes, Ezekiel seemed pretty crazy. I think we’re all glad that we don’t have men like Ezekiel to deal with us anymore. Except today, your “young, crazy fieldworker” is going to preach from Ezekiel. Well, we’ll just hope I don’t feel it necessary to spend 390 days lying on my side in the middle of Bunker Hill. (Skull set on stand next to pulpit throughout sermon).

The question all these crazy actions beg is: why the heck would Ezekiel do all these things? Well you know the saying; drastic times call for drastic measures. This seems to be the motto of Ezekiel. Here is a time in Israel’s history where they had ceased to rely on the Lord. They no longer looked to him to be settled, but rather trusted in their own strength. And so Ezekiel comes out swinging. Israel put its confidence in their armies and they were defeated by foreign nations. Israel put its faith in Jerusalem and the city was overrun. Israel trusted in the temple and the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Finally, king Nebuchadnezzar hauled the best and brightest of Israel, including Ezekiel, out of Jerusalem and sent them into exile in Babylon. They were completely unsettled as they came into their new land.

This situation reminds me of recent times in Iraq. Until the last couple of week the war against terrorism seemed to be going rather well. Our nation had tightened security. We had gone into Iraq and won a blowout victory. The people celebrated with our soldiers in the streets. Today, we fear terrorism attacks again in the face of new assaults. Some people in Iraq are already protesting our presence there, and we’ve had soldiers shot and killed while they try to do their mission there. It seems we got a little too comfortable when the war was really still going on.

And we have gotten too comfortable in our own war as well. Look around you. Do you see a battlefield? It doesn’t look like one, yet the forces of evil are marshaled against us. Satan does his best to tempt us every day, but we often treat daily life more like a vacation than a battle. We settle down in our homes, with our food, and in our church buildings, and forget that there is a barrel still going on all around us.

God looks at Israel and shows them that putting their trust in things like Jerusalem, armies, or temples simply won’t do. He takes Ezekiel, “and he led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.” Yes he calls Israel a bunch of dry bones. And if you look at their spiritual condition, they really were a bunch of dry, tired out, old bones. They worshipped false idols. They neglected worship time for the Lord. They listened to false prophets who told them only what they wanted to hear.

But we too are dry bones! (Holds up a pair of bones, replicas) Look at our worship. We don't always dedicate time to come to church. We neglect church Bible study. We spend little or no time in devotion or private prayer. When these things happen we are basically saying that we will hear from God's Word only what we feel like hearing, not what he's trying to say in Worship, Bible study, or devotions. We'd rather be settled by the stuff around us than God's Word.

And there are even drier bones around us. (Keep holding up bones) How many people don't even have a church home or if they do, come so rarely that it doesn't seem to matter. What do we do? We often don't know what to do; we don't know what to say. (Puts bones away).

With all these dry bones lying around, I am left wondering. Why? After all, in this very lesson God tells Ezekiel to speak the Word of the Lord to the dry bones. Then what will happen? God, "will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attaché tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord." Then it happens. The bones are made alive and they stand up like a great army. God predicts all this will happen when he sends the Spirit. So if that's true, what's going on? After all, today we celebrate Pentecost, which is the day God sent the Holy Spirit to his people on earth. The Church seemed fired up then, but today the church seems in retreat. The churches of the Missouri Synod as well as other Christian churches are decreasing despite the fact that the world's population is increasing. Cults like the Mormons are getting larger. Even the Muslims are growing. Instead, we get kicked out of countries and martyred. We personally are afraid to witness. Then when we do, the people aren't convinced by the Word. Why don't they care? Why don't we look like an army in advance, but retreat?

The reason this text can be so confusing is that it speaks of both today and the future. The text says all these things will be brought to completion when the Lord puts you in your own land. You see, we're not in our own land yet. Our land, our home is heaven. This earthly place we live in is temporary and we can't put our hope or trust in the things here. The predictions of this text will only be partially complete while we are on earth.

The good news is that even partially complete is very good. God has sent the Holy Spirit as he promises in this text. He has breathed the Holy Spirit into us through the waters of Baptism. He has made us alive even though we used to be nothing but dry bones. Every week he keeps knitting together our flesh and maintains us in the midst of the battle by bringing us to church where we hear this word in the Bible. Even in the midst of all the death, the unbelief, and problems in the world Jesus declares to us, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

Look around you. Every single person standing around you in this building has been breathed on by God. God has made alive every person in this building. His words in Scripture, his strength in baptism, and his real presence in the Lord's Supper are the drink he's provided for our thirsty souls. He gives us so much to drink that here in the Gospel lesson for today he predicts streams of living water will come out of us. So we don't put our faith in our homes, possessions, or even our church building, but in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit that comes to us in the words of God. No, those words won't always be what we want. Things may seem to completely contradict what we are expecting God to do. Remember, God's ways are higher than our ways. God's peace is the peace that passes all our understanding. So even with our soldiers dieing, Christians martyred, and our witness not always working, we trust in the Holy Spirit and speak to the world with God's Word rather than our own sense. (Picks up bones)

Then there will finally come the day when God will settle us in our own land as Ezekiel

predicts. God will finally raise us all up from the grave. For the final time he will knot our bones together and put skin on all of us. He will gather us up like a great army. He will stand us all before him and tell us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Then he will take us to our true home in heaven where all will know the Lord. (Puts bones away)

(Hold up a fork) You know, I think I might follow the advice of an email I read a couple of years ago. I think I might be buried with a fork in my hand. Then everyone will come and look at me and ask, "Why does he have that fork?" Do you know what the answer will be? "Because he's ready for dessert. He knows that God has saved the best for last." Amen

APPENDIX 2

RESPONSE DATA FROM PARTICIPANTS EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS OF VISUAL AIDS USED IN THE PROJECT'S SERMONS

Participants from:

- Faith Lutheran Church, Godfrey, Illinois
- Grace Chapel Lutheran Church, Bellefontaine Neighbors, Missouri
- Zion Lutheran Church, Bunker Hill, Illinois

I. Faith Lutheran Church, Godfrey, Illinois

Sermon Preached Weekend May 31-June 1

Title: "Kept in God's Name"

Text: John 17:11b-12

No Visual Aid Used With Hearers Group 1

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. No
2. No

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No
2. No

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. Nothing.
2. Used and illustration but I can't remember what it was.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. No
2. No

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. N/A
2. N/A

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. N/A
2. N/A

Visual Aid Used With Hearers Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. No
2. John 17

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No
2. "You gave these disciples to protect them. Jesus prayed to his Father, "I have finished." And He prayed God would take care of them.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. The preacher talked about how we respond when we see the name of Jesus.
2. The name of Jesus. The preacher gave some history about the group that put up the billboard signs that had the name JESUS on them around the St. Louis area. He gave us the internet address. He mentioned that doing this was a mission outreach.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes
2. Yes

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. A nice poster display of the name JESUS. White letters on a green background.
2. The visual aid was a long sign that reminded me of the billboard sign. Background is green with big white letters JESUS. Reminded me of the street billboards I have seen.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. The preachers did a good job of tying the word JESUS into our daily walk as Christians.
2. He told us about the importance of Jesus name in our lives.

What Was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

John 17:11b-12

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me..."

"While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me."

"None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that the Scripture would be fulfilled."

"So that they may be one as we are one."

"Know this...it is by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:10

"I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:8

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Philippians 2

"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called into one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4

"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." I Corinthians 12

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Colossians 3:17

The main idea or central focus was:

The power in the name Jesus is forgiveness, salvation and life everlasting, a name by which we cling to body and soul in faith; a name to live by.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

Group 1 - No Group 2 - Yes

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

A scaled down version of the JESUS billboards seen beside busy highways. It simply has a green background with the large letters of JESUS name printed across the entire billboard.

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

Telling the hearers that there is no other name under heaven and earth more powerful than this one. The billboard forces people to come face to face with the name of Jesus. For the lost this name is everything from insignificant to hated. For the believer this name offers forgiveness, hope, new life and here and forever.

Sermon Preached Weekend of June 21-22

Text: Mark 4:26-29

Theme: "Ripe for Harvest"

Visual Aid Used With Hearers Group 1

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. No
2. No

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No
2. Stalk, stem.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. Talked about wheat and how it grows.
2. Grinding the wheat in your hand reminded me of when I used to do that as a kid.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes
2. Yes

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. Stalk of wheat. Grains pulled off the stalk.
2. Bundle of wheat. One stalk of wheat pulled out. Grinding grains in your hand.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. I remember the wheat fields and the color of the wheat and that we are the harvest.
2. Unless we are firmly planted in that stalk, the heads don't form. We are nothing without the stalk. Jesus is the stalk.

Visual Not Used Hearers Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. No
2. I'm guessing John.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No
2. No

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. No answer.
2. The sermon was about change in our lives.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. No
2. No

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. N/A
2. N/A

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. N/A
2. N/A

What Was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

Mark 4:26-29

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed...All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."

"Night and day, whether the man sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."

"As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts a sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

The main idea or central focus was:

Like the stalk of wheat, God plants faith in His Son Jesus into our hearts, causes it to grow and bear fruit (grain heads) until the day He comes in all His glory to gather his harvest for eternity.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

Group 1 - Yes Group 2 - No

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

A bundle of wheat stalks held together with a string. Grains of wheat were taken from a single stalk pulled from the bundle and held toward the hearers in the preacher's hand.

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

The bundle was held up right away and the preacher reminisced about his days in the wheat fields in Kansas. A stalk was pulled and the preacher explained that Jesus compares us to one of these stalks of grain. The connection was that God not only provides the soil and the planting but also the growing of our faith in our lives, a faith that will produce grain, good fruit. This faith is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the very Bread of Life given for our nourishment

Sermon Preached Weekend of July 5-6

Text: II Corinthians 4:5-12

Theme: "The Light of Christ--Created, Given and Revealed!"

Visual Was Used With Hearers of Group 1

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. At first I thought it was Acts 2:11 but I believe the passage was actually taken from Philippians 2:8-11. I've got these verses memorized and have always used them to witness to others. (Author's note. This was one of the text's referred to in the May 31 sermon which I discovered this person also attended. She had actually confused the weekends messages. The point is that several weeks later she still remembered the text of a previous sermon.)
2. No.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient. God exalted and gave Him the name above every other name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; things in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."
2. "The Lord is my life and salvation; of whom shall I be afraid?"

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. The preacher told us about what Jesus did for us and our salvation.
2. Nothing.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. We looked into a box, into darkness. Then we looked through a hole in the middle of the box. The box was folded up. All you could see was black. Then he opened the box. Pastor had the picture of Jesus going sideways. It was a famous picture of Jesus.
2. Pastor had a box with a light. The box had a hole in it and Jesus picture was in the box. He held it upside down. It was opened up and then he closed it again.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. He told us that we were lost in sin but through Jesus sacrifice on the cross, instead of looking into darkness, we are looking into the light which is Jesus.
2. I don't remember.

Visual Was Used With Hearers of Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. John
2. The Gospel Reading (Author's note: actually, it was the epistle lesson)
3. Romans

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. Darkness and light and Christ.
2. No
3. Jesus is the light.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. I remember looking into darkness, the light shining through the darkness-- you could see Christ.
2. No.
3. I remember that a visual aid was used.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.
3. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. This was a box with a hole. When you looked in the hole you could see nothing but darkness. When the box fell open, Pastor shone a light on the "face of Christ."
2. There was a box with a black hole in it. I remember Pastor opened the box and there was a picture of the head of Christ. I also remember a light was shone behind the box to make the face of Christ glow.
3. The visual aid was a box, covered with black construction paper, with a round hole cut out in one side. The box had a photo of Jesus inside.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. Pastor told us that the "light shines in the darkness." Without the light of Christ we are in total darkness of our sin.
2. The Bible verse had something to do with Jesus coming into the world and those who know Him have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to know God's Word and those who do not know Him live in a life of darkness and do not know Him.
3. Pastor used the dark box to show how dark our world can be without Jesus in it. When Jesus is in our lives we always have light and can see clearly. When the box opened up I saw a cross made out of the cross with Jesus in the middle. A hole was cut out in the back of the photo of Jesus and Pastor held up a light to the hole to show Jesus as the light.

What was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

II Corinthians 4:5-12

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Ephesians 6:12

"The light has shined in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." John 1

"For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Ephesians 5:8

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." II Corinthians 4:4

*"For your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."
Romans 8:36*

"For the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

"(this light) gives us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

"(this light) is the power of God and the wisdom of God...it is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." I Corinthians 1

"For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body."

The main idea or central focus was:

The saving knowledge that comes to us from the Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, through faith. That knowledge we see in the face of Christ is our redemption, salvation and eternal life.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

Both Groups - Yes

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

A foot square box that had black construction paper pasted all around it except for the four inch round hole cut out of one side of the box. The box was held together with pins. When the pins were pulled out, the box opened up to reveal the shape of a cross. In the middle of the cross was a copy of the face of Jesus taken from a print of a famous resurrection painting of Jesus. Jesus face sat on a heart that covered the entire center of the cross. The cardboard was cut out behind the picture and red heart and a lamp was placed behind the picture so that when you looked at the cross you would see Jesus face lit up, the light literally shining in the face of Jesus.

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

The glory of Christ is seen in the work He did for us on the cross and therefore the cardboard cross. The opening of the box was described as Jesus the light breaks into our darkness, this sinful world and lets His light shine through. The knowledge of Him as light and His face in our hearts is seen in the visual aid. What gives us the light of knowledge is God's Word and Spirit which allows us to understand that the glory of God is seen in the face of Christ. The light shining through Christ's face on the cross was to remind the people that we have the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ in our hearts.

II. Grace Chapel Lutheran Church, Bellefontaine Neighbors, Missouri

Sermon was Preached on June 14-15, 2003

Sermon Text: Romans 8:14-18

Sermon Theme: "Adoption Papers"

Visual Was Not Used With Hearers of Group 1 (Only one evaluation received)

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. Romans

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. "Abba" is Father in Jewish. God works through our spirit.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. When we were baptized we were adopted by God. Our baptismal paper is God's adoption.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes (actually no visual used during the sermon)

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. A baby was baptized.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. This baptism was the baby's adoption into God's kingdom.

A Visual Was Used With the Hearers of Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. None.
2. Romans.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. Unless a man is born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.
2. We are heirs of God.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. The sermon emphasized the profound importance the preacher's baptism and our baptism. Confirmed as a child of God at this time in His grace. Our second birth.
2. We can call God "Abba" Father because we are His by our baptism into His family. He cares for me.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. The preacher's baptismal certificate. He indicated he had it framed in his office.
2. The preacher's baptismal certificate.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. The preacher and we are born again when baptized. The preacher put his baptismal certificate up in his office as a reminder when he was baptized.
2. He shared he was God's child by adoption as sons.

What Was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

Romans 8:14-18

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"son-ship" "adoption" "Abba, Father"

"I tell you, no one will see the kingdom of God unless that person is born again."

The main idea or central focus was:

"When we were baptized, we were born again, adopted into the family of God"

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

Group 1 - No Group 2 - Yes

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

"Preacher's baptismal certificate"

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

Describing that his baptismal certificate was comparable to "adoption" papers. When we are baptized, we are brought into God's family as sons and daughters. We have every right given to us to call God "Abba, Father."

Sermon Preached July 12-13

Sermon Text: Mark 4

Sermon Theme: "Quieting the Storm"

A Visual Aid Was Used With Hearers of Group 1 (evaluations filled out Thursday)

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. Mark 4
2. Mark
3. The Gospel of Mark when Jesus was asleep in the boat.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. The disciples were frightened by the storm and Jesus told the waves to be still.
2. None.
3. Lord, don't you care if we drown.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. That we should have faith and Jesus will care for us.
2. How God is always there for us, even though we ask why things do not go the way we would like. God is always in our boat of life till the end.
3. I remember how it relates to me right now in my life. I have been unemployed for 3 months now and I know God cares about us, but it sometimes seems tough.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. No.
3. No, not that I remember.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. None.
2. None.
3. None.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. None.
2. None.
3. None.

No Visual Aid Used With the Hearers in Group 2 (evaluations filled out Thursday)

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. I believe it was from Matthew.
2. The sermon was based on when Jesus and the disciples were in the boat and a storm came up. I don't remember the exact book.
3. Mark. Calming of the sea. I recently read "Following Jesus" 30 day (it helped my recall.)

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. "Quiet, be still."
2. It was the story when Jesus calmed the storm from the boat.
3. Jesus asleep while the storm began. Lack of faith at times.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. That it was about having faith in Christ in all that we do.
2. That there are two themes to the story. One about the power of Jesus and one about faith.
3. Various times when Jesus lets us know that he is in charge of our lives.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. No.
3. No.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. N/A
2. N/A
3. N/A

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. N/A
2. N/A
3. N/A

What Was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

Mark 4

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"Let's go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee."

"Lord! Don't you care if we're going to drown?"

"Quite! Be still!"

"Do you still have no faith"

The main idea or central focus was:

Even when we don't think that the Lord cares that we are drowning in the troubles of this life, He is there saying, 'Quite! Be still.'" Do we have such little faith that we no longer see the truth that He does indeed care and is powerful enough do show He cares.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

A picture of Jesus standing in a boat during a storm.

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

Group 1 - Yes Group 2 - No

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

To give us a painter's view of the actual scene he was preaching about. The picture was used to reinforce in our minds the picture painted by the words of the Gospel writer Mark

Sermon Preached on August 2-3
Sermon Text: Ephesians 2:19-22
Sermon Theme: "Building the Church"

A Visual Was Used With the Hearers of Group 1

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. Ephesians. (evaluation done Thursday)
2. Ephesians. (evaluation done Saturday)
3. No. (evaluation done Thursday)

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. About building the church, foundations.
2. God's household is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus as the cornerstone.
3. Christ is the chief cornerstone.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. That everyone is part of the foundation of the church, we are the foundation.
2. How even with all of the corruption in the world, Christ's church will prevail. Every time someone partakes of the Lord's Supper or a baptism is performed, another building block is added.
3. The cornerstone of church or home is Jesus. He is the foundation for everything.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.
3. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. Different Lego foundations and walls. One was a strong foundation with a cross in the middle.
2. It was a building made out of Lego blocks.
3. Built by Tim, it was a Lego church with a white cross inside...many different sides. It had one white corner to represent Christ.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. The Legos illustrated the different types of foundations that a church body can have. The church is being tested with things happening in the world and we need to stay strong in our beliefs. Thus, the strong foundation.
2. There were white blocks on a corner to represent the cornerstone of Jesus. Also a cross on the bottom that went to the top to say Jesus is with us always.
3. The Lego church was used to show that the Holy Temple, the Church, even though some of the sides are a little lopsided, is built on the foundation, which is Jesus Christ and building blocks are added constantly.

A Visual Was Used With the Hearers of Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. Ephesians (evaluation done Thursday)
2. Ephesians (evaluation done Saturday)
3. Ephesians 2 (evaluated in the evening on the same day sermon was delivered)

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone; built on the foundation of the apostles; in him the building is joined together.
2. Jesus Christ is the Chief Cornerstone.
3. I believe the passage spoke of how Jesus prevents us from being strangers (or possibly aliens) as it is through Him we each become part of the church.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. The church is built on the foundation of the cross which permeates the entire structure. We as His people are built as living stones into His temple. There are 'holes' in the walls caused by strife and sin but Christ is there with forgiveness.
2. I remember mostly the visual aid. While thinking about it, I remember the white cornerstone as Jesus, that he holds the church together no matter what happens or who comes or goes, we can build up our church with the help of Jesus our solid foundation and strength.
3. What I remember the most is the few key points that the preacher made about how a church is to be "constructed." In particular there were some excellent comments made about how Jesus should be our perfect cornerstone, the cross of Jesus runs completely through the church, not weakening it, but strengthening it, because it is the key factor in our faith. I also recall that he compared each of us to a brick or stone in the construction, explaining how each of us is a portion of the whole, how Christ builds his kingdom by stacking us together correctly. It seems the main point he made here revolve around the idea that the walls of the "church" don't really fit as well as they should. There are holes caused by our sin, which the strength of Christ crucified (running throughout the church) supports and remedies.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.
3. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. Lego block church with a white cornerstone, white cross on the underside; this cross extended into the building. A portion of a wall had holes in it. Individual blocks added later.
2. Lego building, started with four straight solid walls, was added on to, some pieces not solid, or large, some really strange looking, just barely attached.
3. I was in the back so I couldn't actually see the aid real well, but he described it very well and it seems a common enough thing to be easily visualized in my mind's eye. The aid was a church built by the preacher's son out of Legos.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. White Lego blocks at corner = Christ the cornerstone
White Lego cross = Christ, and His love and forgiveness is the foundation of faith.
Wall with holes = sin, strife and imperfection.
Extended arm of blocks = those barely holding on to true faith.
Individual stones = good deeds done out of love for Christ in response to His love.
2. Had a white cornerstone symbolizing Christ and a white cross in the center that held all four walls together and ran all the way through it. Like the sermon hymn "The Church's One Foundation" is Jesus Christ her Lord.
3. As the preacher spoke of the construction of the church he was able to repeatedly bring out the constructed church and point to the discussed areas. Areas such as the cornerstone, cross, and the walls.

What Was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

Ephesians 2:19-22

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"'Who do you say that I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"
(Even though there was only one direct quote from Scripture found in this sermon, the message was loaded with the words and language of the text.)

The main idea or central focus was:

That the hearers trust more in God's building the Church.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

Both Groups - Yes

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

A building made out of Legos. It had a white cornerstone, a white cross in the foundation and white up through the middle. Three odd-shaped walls were also added.

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

He explained to the hearers that the Lego building is a good model of how God is putting together His church. He uses the odd sides to describe the imperfection of the church in this world. He spoke of Jesus as the cornerstone. The foundation with a cross in it is a reminder that it is the message of the apostles, Christ crucified and raised that is foundational. He describes how God is building His church through Word and Sacrament.

III. Zion Lutheran Church, Bunker Hill, Illinois

Sermon Preached the Weekend of May 24-25

Text: Isaiah 61:10

Theme: "Robed in Righteousness: I'm Ready!"

A Visual Was Not Used With Group 1

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. No.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. No.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. Pastor didn't use the yellow sheets for the sermon. We imagined him changing his wardrobe.
2. We were asked to visualize the preacher in a bath robe and then imagine each piece added until he got fully robed for the service.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes. (see next answer)
2. No. (see next answer)

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. Imagination and the preacher's clothing.
2. Imagination and visualizing a bath robe.

Note: The evaluators were considering their own imagination was the visual. They were to use their imaginations when looking at the preachers garments he was wearing. Technically they are agreeing that there was no actual visual aid used.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. N/A
2. N/A

A Visual Was Used With Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. Romans 8

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. Be clothed in righteousness. Put on the breastplate of salvation.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. The fact is we need to be ready for the Lord.
2. No matter how we are clothed, or what state we are in, we should, and will be ready for Christ's coming.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. Several changes of clothing were used. Particular in memory was a blue bathrobe. The preacher came out in street clothes. He needed help in putting church vestments and cross back on.
2. Various changes of clothing were used to show the different robes of a person and appropriate dress for the preacher.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. The Lord is coming. We need to be ready. Wherever we are. The time is not known.
2. Whether a person is clothed in a bathrobe in relaxation or a pastor's robe in humility and praise, we should always be ready for Jesus to come again.

A Visual Was Used With Group 3

Note: This was the only sermon that had a third group evaluation. This sermon was preached at a pastors circuit meeting in May. At their September meeting, four months later almost to the day, four of the pastors who were present were asked to evaluate the sermon.

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. No.
3. Ephesians 6
4. No clue.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. No.
3. No.
4. No clue.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. The preacher related the yoke and the alb to our righteousness in Christ.
2. The preacher made the sign of the cross with his arms.
3. The preacher used his robe to explain to us how we are outfitted to serve Christ.
4. The preacher kept going out of the pulpit and changing clothes.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.
3. Yes.
4. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. The preacher's vestments.
2. The preacher made the sign of the cross with his arms.
3. The preacher's robe.
4. Changing of clothes.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. No.
2. The cross - death and resurrection of Christ.
3. No.
4. No.

What Was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

Isaiah 61:10

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."

"All our righteousness are as filthy rags."

"All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Gal. 3:27

The main idea or central focus was:

Apart from Jesus Christ, we are totally unprepared for the Last Day, being caught "sleeping." However, clothed in Jesus Christ, we are totally prepared for the Last Day, and empowered to do good works as a response of faith.

Was there a visual aid used in the sermon?

Group 1 - No visual aid used.

Group 2 - Yes.

Group 3 - Yes.

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

First the preacher went into the sacristy to change into a blue bathrobe.

The preacher then went into the sacristy and changed into just a suit and tie.

The preacher then went into the sacristy and took off the suit coat and put on the alb.

Then had someone from the congregation come and put the stole and cross on the preacher.

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

Making a connection between the vestments a Pastor wears and the spiritual clothes that we wear because of Christ. The clothes we put on that matter most are the robes of righteousness earned through Christ's death and resurrection which offers eternal life. Only because of His redemptive work are we able to wear these clothes, clothes that cause us to respond in works of love and gratitude

Sermon Was Preached on Weekend of June 7-8
Sermon Text: Ezekiel 37
Sermon Theme: "Being Brought Back Home"

A Visual Was Used With Group 1

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. Ezekiel.
2. Ezekiel. The section about the dry bones.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. Woe to you Jerusalem.
2. Woe to you Israel. Bones coming together.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. Ezekiel's appeal to Jerusalem to live with God as their guide and focus.
2. Ezekiel sitting in the street warning Israel. The bones coming together as God rescuing and uniting His people and saving the remnant despite captivity.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. Skull bone and long bones - fork.
2. An animal skull and two long leg bones.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. We are like dry bones without God in our life. Fork to be held in the hand of a dead body so he could eat dessert because the best is saved for last.
2. Visualized the bones coming together.

A Visual Was Used With Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. Ezekiel 37.
2. Ezekiel 37. Dry bones.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. Woe to you!
2. We are like dry bones, without the Lord we are like dust-worthless. The Lord makes flesh, tendons, etc.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. Ezekiel was called a crazy prophet who proclaimed a restoration of Israel, using the example of dry bones coming to life.
2. It was Pentecost Sunday and he (the preacher?) was on fire for the Lord.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. Skull and two bones.
2. Laying down like dry bones and a cow's skeleton head.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. It demonstrated the dry bones vision and how the Lord restores people.
2. We are like dry bones and without the Lord we are like dust, worthless.

What Was Actually Preached and Done

Note: This sermon was actually delivered by a field work student from the seminary. It was his first sermon delivered before a congregation.

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

Ezekiel 37

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"Woe to you!"

"And he led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry."

God "will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." John 11:25-26

"Well done good and faithful servant."

The main idea or central focus was:

Even as crazy old Ezekiel was proclaiming to those in exile the hope of being brought back home by the power of the Lord, so also, the Lord is proclaiming the importance of revitalization to a church that is often lifeless and misdirected, bringing us back home through Jesus Christ.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

Group 1 and 2 - Yes

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

A cow's skull and a couple of femur bones.

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

The connection of the bones is that this is how we are in our walk in this life in sin. The Lord has revived us through the life-giving work of His Son Jesus who not only died on the cross but was resurrected to new life. We now look forward to resurrection, the day when God will make new tendons and flesh appear for us to wear eternally

Sermon Was Preached on the Weekend of July 26-27

Text: II Corinthians 12:7-10

Theme: "Bowled Over"

A Visual Was Used With Group 1

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. Sorry, no recall. I have trouble remembering yesterday.
2. This I can't remember.

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. Bowling is not what it was when we were young.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. Nothing.
2. The fact that regardless of how we are in our lives or where we are that Jesus is always there and we can be knocked down several times in our lives but he is never knocked down or taken out.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Yes.
2. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. A bowling pin.
2. A bowling pin that the preacher was awarded when he was a boy for a good game.

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. No answer.
2. Bowling Pin - Our Lord is the King Pin in our lives - we have the rest of the pins and we are part of the set of pins as our support group.

A Visual Was Not Used With Group 2

Do you remember the Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon?

1. I don't remember the book, but it was from the Gospel that was read.
2. ?

Do you remember any words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon?

1. No.
2. No.

In a sentence or two, write down what you remembered most about the sermon.

1. No answer.
2. No answer.

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

1. Not sure.
2. Yes.

If so, what was the visual aid?

1. N/A.
2. Something about bowling. (notice there is no identification of an actual visual aid)

How did the preacher use the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages?

1. I guess I'm getting childish as I remember the children's sermon. You arranged the children like bowling pins and came down the aisle with a bowling ball like you were going to bowl.
2. No answer.

What Was Actually Preached and Done

The Bible book, passage, text that was used in the sermon:

II Corinthians 12:7-10

Words or phrases from the Bible that were used in the sermon include the following:

"thorn in the flesh"

"I pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away."

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

The main idea or central focus was:

Even though we, like Paul, are "bowled over by life"--bruised and battered by adverse circumstances in life that can be described as "thorns in the flesh"--as we "five pins" are surrounded by Jesus Christ as the Head Pin, Word and Sacrament as "two and three pins," and fellow Christians as the remaining pins, we are "bowled over by grace!"

Was a visual aid used in the sermon?

Group 1 - Yes

Group 2 - No

The visual aid used in the sermon was:

An old worn out bowling pin that was awarded to the preacher in 1970.

The preacher used the visual aid in connection with the Bible passages by:

The bowling pin characterized the Christian life, emphasizing the Lord's protection and preservation when life "knocks us down" and "beats us up." The preacher picked up the pin several times during the sermon as he described ways that life "bowls us over" and knocks us down, as well as ways that God's grace "bowls us over" and "picks us up."

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