Preaching for the Church

by Richard R. Caemmerer

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To
Dorothy

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FOREWORD

This book attempts to relate the many facets of Christian preaching, its preparation and delivery, to a covering theological principle, namely, that *preaching is God's Word in Christ to people*. This principle is in the forefront of contemporary Christian thought because of fresh interest in Biblical studies, concern for the theology of the church, and new insight into the meaning of the Word of God. It has these components:

1. *God has redeemed men through Christ to he His own and puts the Word of Christ on the lips of people to give men life and faith.*

The pulpit is not the only means by which preaching reaches people. But it is a respectable and useful one, attached usually to the fellowship of the Christian Church in worship.

2. *The Scriptures set forth God's plan in Christ and hence are the primary source and shape of this message.*

The ample Scripture references in this book are intended to describe not merely its teaching but the process by which the preacher makes use of it.

3. *The people who have come to faith in God through Christ are His church and need to receive and to give His Word for their life.*

This book is entitled *Preaching for the Church*, to suggest that the preacher, from and on behalf of the church, conveys the Word of God not merely to its own members but also to its world.

4. *Every stage of preparation for preaching, as well as preaching itself, requires that the preacher be equally concerned for the Word from God and for the people to whom the Word must come.*

This axiom leads to the discussion of many practical details in the construction of sermons and their delivery and in the management of the preacher's time and calling. They are not to lose their connection with the theological principle at the heart of preaching.

This book is not a documented survey of homiletics and carries no footnotes. The author is grateful to every Christian preacher and teacher whose work he has read. But unless otherwise stated, the theology and the process outlined herein are his own, hammered out through twenty years of

teaching and thirty of preaching. *For Further Reading*, after the body of the book, suggests literature not for corroboration of the text but for the reader's continued study.

The book is laid out in small chapters grouped in sections in order to restate its basic presuppositions and in order to suggest special areas of concentration and study to the reader or to conferences that wish to use it.

Countless people have contributed to the thought of this book — lay parishioners, brother pastors, theological professors, speech teachers, students. A lasting debt is acknowledged to our late colleagues John H. C. Fritz, Frederick Mayer, and William Arndt. Among students a series of graduate fellows and teaching assistants were most helpful: Paul Harms, Edward Wessling, William Backus, Milton Rudnick, Harold Scheibert, and David Schuller, the latter now a colleague in the division of preaching; our coworkers Alex W. C. Guebert, George Hoyer, Arthur Vincent, John Pfitzer, have been stimulating likewise. Notable have been contacts and discussions at many preaching workshops in various parts of the country, at the meetings of the Association of Seminary Professors in the Practical Fields, and the lectures at the Luther Academy of Wartburg Seminary, the Passavant Lectures of Chicago Lutheran Seminary, and the Gullixson Lectures in Luther Seminary. The tough and frank demand of the seminary classes through the years and the combined indulgence and candor of my family stand out in memory.

In the preparation of this book the Literature Board of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod has been most helpful, particularly its chairmen, the Rev. Alfred Doerffler and the Rev. William H. Eifert. Dr. O. A. Dorn, manager of Concordia Publishing House, has been gracious through the years, Prof. Elmer Foelber and his staff in the Editorial Department have labored most efficiently, and the services of Miss Lillian Brune and her staff in planning layout and of Mr. J. H. John of the Editorial Department, who prepared the indexes, are appreciated. Miss Rosemary Lipka rendered service and encouragement as a secretary in the initial stages. Utterly essential for completing this book was the sabbatical quarter granted by my Seminary and Synod.

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1. The Preaching of the Cross
2. The Calling of the Preacher
3. The Goals of Preaching
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SECTION ONE

Preaching and God

Preaching proclaims a message. The message is from God. God wants to tell men about the life which He has for them as a gift. As men are born into the world they do not have this life. Preaching tells of God's gift of life, which He gives to men through His Son Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross and rose again that men might live.

Preaching does more than tell of this gift of life. It gives it. Through preaching God tells of His life to the world, but more: through preaching God gives Himself to the world.

Hence the preacher is God's tool to restore God's life in people. Preaching utters words. Yet when it is truly preaching, it is the Word of God to man and the power of God at work in man.

The preacher speaks God's own Word to man: "I have redeemed you, you are Mine."

Chapter One

THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS

Through the years the word *preach* has become a bit worn. "Don't preach to me" —that usually means: "Don't use that holier-than-thou attitude toward me, don't carp at my conduct." Or, "His trouble is that he preaches too much" —that may mean: "He talks with a great deal of pressure, and he doesn't make it interesting."

Yet the word "preach" should have a noble and vital ring to it. Particularly the man whom people call "the preacher" ought to be very clear in his own mind about what he is doing. For he brings a message from God. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). These words of St. Paul suggest that preaching is God's own act of rescuing men from death. It is God's saving Word to men.

This means preaching of a very special kind. St. Paul went on to make clear what kind he meant: "We preach Christ Crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23). "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2)

The Meaning of Preaching

The term *preaching* has worn out so badly, for the most part, because it has been made to refer to pious talk in general rather than to Gods great message in particular. Look at some of the words which the Authorized Version translates "preaching." They help to sharpen the focus.

"To tell good news" is the meaning of *euangelizomai*. St. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says:

> Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received — how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (Vv. 1–4)

St. Luke uses the same word in a saying of Jesus: "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefor am I sent." (4:43)

Another word translated "preach" is *katangello*. This is quite like the previous term with the addition of the idea of "thoroughly, emphatically." It is used of the preaching of the apostles in Jerusalem — the preaching that put them in prison! (Acts 4:2) St. Paul uses it of his own preaching of Christ, "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." (Col. 1:28)

Another word translated "preach" and used very frequently in the New Testament is *kerysso*, "proclaim as a herald." The message itself is then called the *kerygma*, a proclamation. That word is sometimes translated "preaching" (Matt. 12:41; 1 Cor. 1:21). In Matt. 9:35 Jesus is described as teaching in the synagog, "and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom." In Rom. 10:8 St. Paul speaks of "the Word of faith, which we preach":

> that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (V. 9)

This term stresses the fact that the preacher proclaims a stirring and vital message as he represents God Himself to the people.

Other words, too, are translated in the Authorized Version as "preach," but these are sufficient to stress the purpose, the energy, and the content of preaching.

The Content of Preaching

Look how the New Testament sets forth the content of preaching. In the words quoted above from 1 Cor. 15:1–4 St. Paul gives a quick summary of it. Preaching tells the story of Jesus Christ, namely, that He died for our sins as the Scriptures had foretold and that He rose from the dead according to that same predicted plan. This is another way of saying that Jesus is the Messiah and Redeemer planned by God for the release of His people and foretold in words of God through many centuries. That story is not for entertainment or simply for matching prophecy and fulfillment; its purpose is to help people "stand" and "be saved." That standing is not merely a

steadfastness in belief and under adversity, but it is a standing upright, under the very judgment of God, as a forgiven sinner. And the salvation denotes that full and final release, a release from every enemy and malady, into which Gods people shall enter on His Day.

A similar summary of the content of preaching in the New Testament sense is given by Jesus Himself in words spoken on the evening of His resurrection:

> Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:46, 47; the word for "preach" is *kerysso*).

Evidently St. Paul had this saying of Jesus in mind when he wrote 1 Cor. 15:1–4; and certainly St. Peter did as he addressed Cornelius and his company in the words of Acts 10:34–43. Jesus' words are a mandate to His disciples for all time, and they are the answer to the perennial question of the preacher: "What must I say in order to preach the Gospel?" Note the list of ingredients:

1. Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, a teacher in Galilee and Judea, crucified in Jerusalem, is the Messiah planned by God to redeem His people.

2. According to that same plan, announced in the Old Testament Scriptures, He rose from the dead and thus still lives and rules.

3. The story of His life, death, and resurrection is a message which His followers proclaim to their world and to each other.

4. This message has turning and changing power, bringing the thrust of God's own life to bear on those who hear it.

5. It has this power because it conveys the forgiveness of sins, which is the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection.

Two other ingredients were explicit in the message already in the days of the apostles: this Christ is at once the man Jesus and the Son of the living God; and He will return in glory to reign forever.

The Foolishness of Preaching

Since the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection has such superhuman and eternal power and purpose, men should preach it with force, persuasiveness, and the impress of God's own seriousness and design. God Himself is at work in preaching. Is it, then, necessary to train preachers or to write books about preaching?

Preachers face an obstacle in their work, and God and His people stand by to help preachers face and overcome it. This obstacle is that the Gospel seems foolish and useless to many hearers. St. Paul analyzes the difficulty in the opening chapter of 1 Corinthians. To the Jewish mind, steeped in law and presuming to stand approved before God through behavior, the preaching of the Cross of Christ and the remission of sins seemed immoral. To the Greeks, who exalted the power of the human mind, the message seemed irrational. Both types of people found it hard to understand how God would plan to carry out His purpose through such a message, "the foolishness of preaching." Even Christians felt that the plan of God needed some sort of human reinforcement in the shape of human skill and eloquence.

These attitudes of hearers mirror themselves in the preacher, in a sense of insufficiency. How can mere words spoken by a human being carry out the plans of the eternal God? How can a weak human being, and one convinced of his own shortcomings and sinfulness, speak the words of the holy God? When Moses was commissioned to be God's servant to Israel, he felt his insufficiency keenly (Ex. 3:11). In his vision of the glory of God, Isaiah's first reaction was: "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." (Is. 6:5)

The Power of God

The answer to these misgivings lies in God's plan itself, and every way by which preachers can be alerted to their place in His plan is therefore essential and helpful for their task. The preaching of Jesus Christ is in God's own plan for saving people. Suppose preaching is foolishness — "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27). Suppose we are weak and sinful and yet have the call placed upon us to be preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ —

> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor. 3:4–6, RSV)

Jeremiah protested God's call: "Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." But God said: "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak" (Jer. 1:6,7). This is the preacher's power: God uses him in His high business, and He gives him His own Word to speak.