

Features

From the Editor.....	2
Pastors Conference.....	3
Ideas for Illustrating.....	4

Articles

Christocentric: What Does This Mean? Part 4: For Us... and for Our Salvation <i>Dale Meyer</i>	8
Preaching First-Person Narrative Sermons, Part 2 <i>Paul J. Grime</i>	12

Sermon Studies

Pentecost 15, <i>Mark 7:14–23</i> A Defiled Heart Made Clean— <i>Stephen K. Preus</i>	16
Pentecost 16, <i>Isaiah 35:4–7a</i> Reversing the Ramifications of Sin— <i>Stephen K. Preus</i>	19
Pentecost 17, <i>Mark 9:14–29</i> Our Able Savior— <i>Kurt E. Reinhardt</i>	22
Pentecost 18, <i>Jeremiah 11:18–20</i> Faithfulness in Time of Betrayal— <i>Douglas L. Rutt</i>	25
St. Michael and All Angels, <i>Revelation 12:7–12</i> The Victory in Heaven Brings Hope on Earth!— <i>Charles A. Gieschen</i>	28
Pentecost 20, <i>Genesis 2:18–25</i> A Beautiful Design— <i>Douglas L. Rutt</i>	31
Pentecost 21, <i>Hebrews 3:12–19</i> Warning and Encouragement for Today— <i>Shawn P. Nettleton</i>	34
Pentecost 22, <i>Hebrews 4:1–13 (14–16)</i> And I Will Give You Rest— <i>John E. Hill</i>	37
Reformation Day (Observed), <i>Matthew 11:12–19</i> Faithful Christians in a Contentious World— <i>John E. Hill</i>	40
All Saints' Day (Observed), <i>Revelation 7:(2–8) 9–17</i> Your Future Is Bright and Glorious!— <i>Charles A. Gieschen</i>	43
Pentecost 25, <i>Hebrews 9:24–28</i> Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice— <i>Shawn P. Nettleton</i>	46
Pentecost 26, <i>Mark 13:1–13</i> In Christ We Will Endure— <i>Kurt E. Reinhardt</i>	49
Last Sunday of the Church Year: Christ the King, <i>Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14</i> The Clash of the Kingdoms— <i>Joel D. Heck</i>	53

Special Sermons

Labor Day, <i>Ruth 2</i> The Lord Be with You!— <i>Mark B. Anderson</i>	57
Pentecost 19, <i>Numbers 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29</i> Normally Ordinary, but Sometimes...— <i>Neil D. Wheeler</i>	59
Last Sunday of the Church Year: Sunday of the Fulfillment, <i>Mark 13:24–37</i> The Gift of Hope— <i>Joel D. Heck</i>	60
Thanksgiving Day, <i>Luke 17:11–19</i> Give Thanks: Not Just For, but To— <i>Neil D. Wheeler</i>	63
Symposium Sermon, <i>1 Peter 1:3–6</i> Living by Hope in a Secular Age— <i>David J. Peter</i>	65
Funeral Sermon for a Pastor's Wife, <i>John 11:17–27</i> Martha, Mary, and Marge: Servants of the Lord— <i>Jonathan F. Meyer</i>	67
Funeral Sermon for a Pastor Father, <i>Isaiah 43:1–3a; 1 John 2:1–2;</i> <i>Luke 15</i> Jag är Döpt i Jesu Namn— <i>Eric R. Andræ</i>	68

Children's Messages

Pentecost 15–16— <i>Stephen K. Preus</i>	71
Pentecost 17— <i>Kurt E. Reinhardt</i>	72
Pentecost 18— <i>Douglas L. Rutt</i>	72
St. Michael and All Angels— <i>Carl C. Fickenscher II</i>	73
Pentecost 20— <i>Douglas L. Rutt</i>	73
Pentecost 21— <i>Shawn P. Nettleton</i>	74
Pentecost 22—Reformation Day— <i>John E. Hill</i>	74
All Saints' Day— <i>Carl C. Fickenscher II</i>	75
Pentecost 25— <i>Shawn P. Nettleton</i>	76
Pentecost 26— <i>Kurt E. Reinhardt</i>	76
Last Sunday of the Church Year: Christ the King— <i>Joel D. Heck</i>	77
Last Sunday of the Church Year: Sunday of the Fulfillment— <i>Carl C. Fickenscher II</i>	77

Index

.....	78
Coming Next Issue.....	80

From the Editor

“That was interesting, Pastor.”

Reading this in black-and-white, we can't discern any facial cues that suggest *what kind of* “interesting” he means—“good interesting” or “bad interesting.” Cautiously we venture forth: “O . . . kay . . . tell me more.”

What we can be sure is that “interesting” means he heard *something*. That in itself is good. The alternative, that he heard nothing—or at least nothing noteworthy—does not serve the Gospel of Christ crucified. Besides, the alternative carries the rather discouraging moniker of “Boring Sermon.”

So what makes a sermon “interesting,” in any sense of the word? We would suggest three factors, and two of them are advanced in the two articles offered in this issue.

First, and most obviously, “interesting” should involve provocative substance. Not that sermons have to plow new ground every week. Paul taught us that everything is to be Christ crucified, yes, every time (1 Cor 2:2). And we seldom “get” anything the first time, nor fully understand it the fourteenth time. But the Gospel, the cross, is so rich, so far-reaching into every alcove of life, that there truly can be new things to say about the one thing with every sermon.

Dale Meyer gives us a great example of this in his fourth reflection on Christocentric preaching, “For Us . . . and for Our Salvation,” beginning on page 8. He points out that our understanding of the Gospel as forgiveness answering guilt is precious and thoroughly biblical but not exhaustive of the biblical witness. Recalling J. A. O. Preus III's *Just Words*, he notes that the Scriptures present a range of images and applications of the Good News worthy of the creative genius of the Creator-Inspired—all of them results of the cross. And citing Rick Marrs's book *Making Christian Counseling More Christ Centered*, he focuses on one particular polarity of Law and Gospel we may underpreach: shame and honor.

Tellingly, Meyer relates a story of a cab driver, a recent immigrant, finding a faithful and accurate Gospel presentation on Christ's forgiveness of his sins “not interesting.” A faculty colleague of mine, Don Wiley (an excellent hom professor, by the way!), demonstrates in his dissertation that Asian, African, Latin American, and other cultures value honor and fear shame far more than they grasp forgiveness of sins. Increasingly, that's true of our own culture as well. Thus, shame-honor may be more interesting to many hearers—especially if we haven't preached it much in the past.

Now, of course, when it comes to provocative content in a sermon, there is that possibility of “bad interesting.” If it isn't the message of Holy Scripture, God bless our hearers

if it catches their ear and earns a polite (at first) comment at the narthex door. But realize that shame, as surely as guilt, is removed by the cross of Christ. Meyer gives plenty of texts to illustrate.

We would suggest three factors that make a sermon “interesting.”

follow. The most insightful content fired scattershot at a congregation will be heard by almost no one. Boring by the third minute. Christ, even if proclaimed, will be missed.

Beginning on page 12, Paul Grime gives us the second of his two installments on first-person narrative preaching. It's a way to arrange the biblical material to make the point (and this moves also into the canon of rhetoric called Style) that may be quite interesting. Interesting both because we don't do it very often (and probably *ought not* to do it *too* often) and because everybody loves a good story. Not necessarily because stories are entertaining. But because story has an arrangement, a movement—plot—that progresses in a way people can follow. And *first-person* narrative has the added attraction of letting us see a familiar biblical story from a new perspective, perhaps from the observations of one of the participants in the events of the text. Once more, this can't be for show; it must be to show Christ. And Grime gives ample examples.

Finally, third, and in a print journal we can only theorize this, sermons are “interesting” if the delivery keeps the hearers engaged. Sorry, folks, but hearers, after perhaps first grade, are simply not as skilled at listening to a voice reading to them as they are at engaging a fully present human being who's actually speaking to them the way real people actually speak to real people. You're not as skilled at it either—considering that you converse with folks dozens of hours every week and then spend maybe forty minutes a week reading to an audience. No surprise when hearers don't find a read sermon interesting. Try as they might, they just can't bear it.

“Well, Pastor, it was really interesting the way you brought the whole thing back to the cross.” Good interesting.

Carl Fickenscher

Carl C. Fickenscher II

Ideas for Illustrating

Pentecost 15

The Rescued Rusty Tin Can

In the novel *The Hammer of God* by Bo Giertz, a young Swedish pastor tells his senior pastor that he is saved since he gave his heart to Jesus. The senior pastor replies: “‘If you think you are saved because you give Jesus your heart, you will not be saved. You see, my boy,’ he continued reassuringly, as he continued to look at the young pastor’s face, in which uncertainty and resentment were shown in a struggle for the upper hand, ‘it is one thing to choose Jesus as one’s Lord and Savior, to give him one’s heart and commit oneself to him, and that he now accepts one into his little flock; it is a very different thing to believe on him as Redeemer of sinners, of whom one is chief. One does not choose a Redeemer for oneself, you understand, nor give one’s heart to him. The heart is a rusty old can on a junk heap. A fine birthday gift, indeed! But a wonderful Lord passes by, and has mercy on the wretched tin can, sticks his walking cane through it and rescues it from the junk pile and takes it home with him. That is how it is’” (*The Hammer of God* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004], 147).

“A rusty old can on a junk heap”—that’s quite an apt paraphrase of what our Lord says about the human heart (Mk 7:21–22).

Stephen K. Preus, Vinton, Iowa

Pentecost 16

The Nursing Home Reimagined

Imagine the typical scene when you go into the nursing home. You walk in and see Nancy in a wheelchair, sitting at a table alone in the dining room. Harvey is at a nearby table. He didn’t catch that you came in because his hearing is just about completely gone; that’s why he doesn’t talk much anymore either. Shirley is there too, and she can hear just fine, but she can’t see who you are, her eyes not responding to the injections she’s been receiving for her glaucoma.

Then, inexplicably, Nancy jumps out of her wheelchair with a big smile on her face, opens up her arms, and runs toward you like a deer leaping in the field. Harvey actually hears her, his ears suddenly unstopped, and he begins to sing the doxology in as beautiful a tenor voice as you’ve ever heard, bidding you and everyone to join in with him. And Shirley sees it all, eyes not only opened but also clear and bright, looking right in your eyes with a tear just ready to be wiped away.

This is just a small picture of what the day Isaiah is describing (Is 35:5–6) will look like when Jesus returns to

reverse the ramifications of sin for all who trust in him and bring us into the new creation.

Stephen K. Preus, Vinton, Iowa

Pentecost 17

Not Up to the Job

There are things that no matter how hard we try and try again, we simply cannot do. There are three blocks of wood out by the chopping block behind the church that stand as proof to me of that fact. The rest of the big old ash tree is split and stacked in the wood shelter against the garage, drying out for the winter, but those three twisted, knotted-up blocks of wood are still lying out back on the green grass. The many marks of the axe on their ends and the dents from the wedge that I tried to drive in with the sledgehammer are proof positive that I tried and tried again until my poor sweating body simply couldn’t try anymore. And I was not able. I was not up to the job.

Such was the disciples’ realization when a desperate father asked them to drive a demon out of his son. They’d tried—probably relying on their own rookie skills as exorcists—and not been up to the job. It took Jesus stepping in to rescue the boy (Mk 9:14–29).

So now look on Jesus sweating in agony on Calvary, trying and trying for you until it was all finished. No, beloved, there are no unsplit blocks lying at the foot of the cross. What we were not able to do he has accomplished. It is finished. Christ has done it all for you. He is more than able to take care of all things for you. So look upon the wounds in his hands and feet and his side today as he comes to you in his body and blood, and leave all your fears, worries, and cares in his most able and capable hands.

Kurt E. Reinhardt, Gowanstown, Ontario

Pentecost 18

Blinded by the Truth

Sometimes it’s hard for us to accept the truth, even when it’s before our very eyes. It seems to be in our human nature that it’s a lot easier to deny the truth than accept it, especially when that truth is going to hurt. People will do anything to get out of confronting the error of their ways.

A mother recounted that when her son got his driver’s license at the age of sixteen, he got pulled over by the police for speeding. But it wasn’t just a little over the limit. He got pulled over for going ninety-five miles an hour in a fifty-five-miles-per-hour zone. You would think the boy would be very sorry for what he’d been caught red-handed doing. What was his reaction when he finally had to tell his mother about it? If it weren’t so sad, it would be funny. He wanted

Christocentric: What Does This Mean? Part 4: For Us . . . and for Our Salvation

Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer, Pastor Emeritus, Collinsville, Illinois

Editor's Note: This is the fourth of a series of articles by Dr. Meyer, president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, from 2005 to 2020 after serving as *Lutheran Hour* speaker from 1989 to 2001. In each article, Dr. Meyer is offering homiletical reflections drawn from his years of study and experience, both as a preacher and as a teacher of preaching, on keeping our preaching focused on Christ. This year, *CPR* Volume 34, we offer the first four installments. Then two years from now, in *CPR* Volume 36, Dr. Meyer will resume and complete his series with the final four articles.

In a plenary presentation to Concordia Seminary's 2019 Multiethnic Symposium, Dr. Abjar Bahkou shared the story of Jason, a committed evangelical Christian whose witness to a cab driver fell flat.

He was having a conversation with a central Asian taxi driver about God, and there was an open door to share the Gospel. So he said something like, "Your sins make you guilty before God, but Jesus died so your sins could be forgiven, and you could escape punishment." The driver's eyebrows bunched up as if he was listening to an entirely different language. At that moment, Jason realized that his explanation of the Gospel did not resonate emotionally and connectively in the heart of the driver from central Asia. The reason is (first) because the driver hardly sensed personal guilt for wrongdoing, for he was not seeking personal forgiveness. Second, the courts in central Asia are notoriously corrupt. So using legal language such as *guilt*, *restitution*, and *judge* to explain how God saves people sounded strange to him. That conversation prompted Jason to learn more about how to present the Gospel to a non-Western culture.¹

Western Christianity, and Lutheranism in an outstanding way, has defined Christ's work in terms of guilt and forgiveness. This key heritage of the Reformation is a legal, forensic way of understanding the justification of the sinner before God. That makes sense for us but obviously not for the cab driver. Today, 80 percent of the global world thinks in terms of shame and honor, not guilt and forgiveness, and more and more Americans are seeing life through the lens of shame and honor. Rick Marrs, in *Making Christian Counseling More Christ Centered*, writes, "This forensic language is too narrow for many, especially those in the younger generation. Many people have a more nebulous sense of that something is wrong with them, even though they do not objectively

think that they have done something horrible or have a deep sense of sin."²

There are several reasons for the increase of shame/honor among Americans. Non-European immigrants like the taxi driver are a growing percentage of the American population. Lifelong Americans are rejecting absolute truth and walking away from institutions, like our church, that teach absolutes. The media fills that vacuum with, among other things, individualists and affinity groups honoring their own ideological or partisan cause while shouting, "Shame on you!" and canceling those who dare disagree.

How can we faithfully and effectively proclaim Jesus Christ "for us . . . and for our salvation," as the Nicene Creed puts it, in a culture that does not put a premium on right and wrong? This essay proposes that feelings of shame and honor, which are more present in biblical literature than our Western eyes might notice, provide entrée for our preaching of the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, "the article by which the church stands and falls": "People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight."³

Shame/Honor or Guilt/Forgiveness

Brené Brown, professor, author, and podcaster, defines the difference between guilt and shame. "The majority of shame researchers and clinicians agree that the difference between shame and guilt is best understood as the difference between 'I am bad' and 'I did something bad.'"⁴ She gives examples of shame, a list that certainly includes many Sunday worshippers:

- Shame is getting laid off when we're expecting our first child.
- Shame is hiding my addiction.
- Shame is raging at my kids.
- Shame was my response to seeing my parents' shame when I came out.
- Shame is covering up a mistake at work and getting caught.
- Shame is failing at my business after my friends invested in it.
- Shame is getting a promotion, then getting demoted six months later because I wasn't succeeding.

- Shame is my boss calling me a loser in front of our colleagues. . . .
- Shame is watching things change so fast and no longer knowing how and where I can contribute.⁵

Pentecost 15 (Proper 17B), September 1, 2024

The readings for **Pentecost 15, September 1, 2024**, can serve as a primer about guilt and shame. “Shame and guilt are interrelated yet distinct creatures that torment the human psyche.”⁶ In the Gospel for the day (Mk 7:14–23), Jesus invites us to deep personal reflection: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness” (v 21). Imagine if your inmost thoughts and feelings were revealed to friends and family, how completely ashamed you would feel. Shame, “I am bad,” describes the natural man without the cleansing of Christ, whereas guilt, “I did something wrong,” can be superficial, especially when weekly Confession and Absolution in worship become rote. Sooner or later, what is in the depth of your being will be revealed (cf Gospel for Pentecost 21, October 13, 2024, the rich young man who imagined he had kept all the commandments, Mk 10:17–22; see also Heb 4:13, the Epistle for Pentecost 22, October 20, 2024: “No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account”).⁷

One symptom of shame is feeling unclean, “feelings of contamination and dirtiness, with filth that is too deep to wash away,” a metaphor appropriate for these readings.⁸ “Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die” (*LSB* 761:3). The Introit for Pentecost 15 (Ps 51:7, 10–12) prays for Gospel cleansing: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God.”⁹ If the shame comes from our own sin (dishonoring God by not obeying his commandments, the Old Testament Reading, Deut 4:1–2, 6–9), the declaration of the Gospel forgives and justifies us when we believe it (“just as if I had no sin”). Struggling against the resultant shame then becomes an ongoing task of sanctification. If our shame comes not from our sin but from the sin of another, we (1) pray for the repentance of the sinner and, again, (2) strive in our life of sanctification to replace our feeling of shame with the honor God graciously bestows upon his regenerate children.

Whatever the source of our shame, the Word that forgives our sin in justification also gives us the “whole armor of God” to grow in sanctified living (Epistle, Eph 6:10–20). The two cultural lenses, guilt/forgiveness and shame/honor, need not trap us in an either/or corner. Putting on the whole armor of God is what we justified, regenerated people should do because we remain *simul iustus et peccator* on this side of the parousia. Baptism is an apt point of Gospel application because it is both the washing (cleansing) of forgiveness *and* ongoing

grace for sanctified living: both/and, not either/or. “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death” for a purpose, that “we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). In our sanctified struggle against shame, we have “a very present help” (Ps 46:1), the exalted, reigning, and soon-to-return Christ, who is guarding us, present tense, through the “whole armor of God” against the wiles of Satan, which includes his manipulation of shame to lead us to despair. Luther: “A new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” “Although we are attacked by these things [shame and vice], we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”¹⁰

Jesus used shame as an entrée to guilt when he spoke with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (Jn 4:6–42). She was shunned, an outcast in her community, another symptom of shame.¹¹ Zeba Crook, in “Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited,” referred to Bruce Malina’s basic work on New Testament anthropology.¹²

There are two types of honor; Malina calls them “ascribed honor” and “acquired honor.” Ascribed honor is the honor with which one is born by ethnicity, family reputation, gender, wealth, and so on. This honor tends to be less dynamic than acquired honor, which can be won and lost on a daily basis through acts of benefaction and the agonistic contest of challenge and riposte.¹³

Like many in American society, the Samaritan woman had no ascribed honor in her community, only shame from others, but from Jesus she acquired honor surpassing any human judgment, the honor we have as God’s created, redeemed, and beloved people. We don’t know how that changed her reputation in town, *coram hominibus*, but *coram deo* she could see herself as honored. Continuing to see herself through Jesus certainly became critical to her growth in sanctification. To help her, she had a newfound community of like-minded believers. “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” And when Jesus stayed for two more days, “many more believed because of his word” (Jn 4:39, 41). Samaritans then or believers today, Christocentric congregational life shown in time and unhurried talk ministers to shame. More about that later.

Pentecost 16 (Proper 18B), September 8, 2024

Honor and shame were baked into the highly stratified life of the Roman Empire and often appear in Scripture. We might think egalitarian America is different, but no; shaming is endemic in hyperindividualistic, social media-saturated, tribal, cancel-culture America. The readings for **Pentecost 16, September 8, 2024**, present shame and—this is important—add eschatological hope. In the Gospel, Jesus meets and helps two social outcasts (Mk 7:24–37). As with the Samaritan woman, Jesus identifies the reason for the Syrophenician woman’s shame, her ascribed label

**PENTECOST 15 (PROPER 17),
SEPTEMBER 1, 2024**

A Defiled Heart Made Clean

Text: Mark 7:14-23

Other Lessons: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 119:129-136; Ephesians 6:10-20

Sermon Theme: God takes our defiled hearts and creates clean, fruitful hearts by his Gospel.

Sermon Goal: That hearers confess that their hearts produce nothing but evil but that by the Gospel God creates in them new, clean hearts that desire to keep his commandments.

Hymns:

By Grace I'm Saved	LSB 566
How Can I Thank You, Lord	LSB 703
On My Heart Imprint Your Image	LSB 422
O God, My Faithful God	LSB 696

Rev. Stephen K. Preus, Pastor,
Trinity Lutheran Church, Vinton, Iowa

Liturgical Setting

During the season of Pentecost, our hearts are focused on the life of Christ's church. By nature, however, our hearts are focused on anything but this life in Christ. Our *Gospel* contains no good news about our hearts. Rather, "out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts" (Mk 7:21). Yes, God says that "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen 8:21), and, "the heart is deceitful above all things . . . and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9).

The *Introit*, however, gives us the Gospel that God washes away our iniquity and cleanses us from our sin, creating in us "a clean heart" by his grace alone. This clean heart comes from Christ, who shed his blood on the cross to wash us clean and show us his Father's gracious heart. The Spirit delivers this clean heart to us through his work in the means of grace. Through these means, our hearts are focused on the life we have in Christ and how he is still at work in our midst.

This clean heart we have through faith in Jesus does not eradicate the natural, defiled heart within us, though. Instead, we still have the old man (cf Rom 7:18). Thus, in the *Old Testament Reading*, the Lord tells Israel to listen to everything he is teaching them. "Only take care," he says, "and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life" (Deut 4:9a). There is great need for believers in Christ to keep God's Word and salvific work before themselves

so that it is imprinted upon their hearts and the hearts of their "children" and "children's children" (4:9b). The natural, defiled heart, aided by the world and the devil, is trying to push that clean heart out.

How do we "take care," though? The only "source of all that is just and good," our *Collect* reminds us, is God. He alone will "nourish in us every virtue and bring to completion every good intent that we may grow in grace and bring forth the fruit of good works." The *Epistle* teaches that God causes us to "stand against the schemes of the devil" by giving us "the whole armor of God" (Eph 6:11). We "stand firm" (v 13) by putting on this baptismal armor, taking up this armor that he provides us through his means of grace. With this armor on, our hearts remain clean through faith alone, and we are connected to Christ, the source of our new spiritual life.

Relevant Context

The Pharisees and scribes had gathered to Jesus when they witnessed his disciples eating with defiled, unwashed hands. This contradicted the tradition of the elders. They questioned Jesus for allowing his disciples to do this. Jesus called them hypocrites, quoting Isaiah, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mk 7:6b-7; cf Is 29:13). This "heart" of the Pharisees and scribes, and really of all mankind, Jesus speaks to more specifically in our Gospel text.

Textual Notes

V 14: προσκαλεσάμενος, "called to himself." Jesus tenderly invited the crowd to himself because they had been deceived by the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus wants to "guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice" (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, Sixth Petition).

ἀκούσατέ μου πάντες καὶ σύνετε, "listen to me all of you and understand." Jesus is looking not for those who listen only with their ears but for those who understand with their minds and hearts. Verse 16, which is in the Byzantine text but not well attested elsewhere and therefore not in most translations, reinforces this understanding: "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

V 15: κοινῶσαι . . . κοινῶντα, "defile." The verb κοινῶω is used five times in this lesson. It means to make common or impure. We get from this word the word *Koine*, which is the common form of Greek in which the New Testament is written, as distinguished from Classical Greek. The Pharisees and scribes had complained about Jesus' disciples not going

through the ceremonial washings, indicating that they were defiled because they ate food with unwashed hands. Jesus now counters their claim by telling them that it is not what comes in from the outside but what comes out from the inside that defiles a person.

τὸν ἄνθρωπον, “the person, man.” This use of the article is known as a generic article and refers to the class of all mankind. It is proverbial. We see the same in verses 18, 20, 21, and 23. It means that everything spoken of in these verses about the defiled and evil heart applies to every single person who has ever lived or ever will live—except Jesus Christ. Christians have hearts cleansed by faith (Acts 15:9) but still have the sinful heart that dwells in them (Rom 7:17–20).

V 17: καὶ ὅτε εἰσῆλθεν εἰς οἶκον ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου, “and when he had entered the house and left the people.” Beginning with this verse, the audience changes. Here ἀπό communicates separation. Jesus’ audience had been the crowd, but now Jesus separates and begins to catechize his disciples, who ask him about the parable.

V 18: οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοί ἐστε; “Then are you also without understanding?” Jesus brings out the need for catechizing the disciples, who are more like the crowds than they might realize.

V 19: καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα, “cleansing all foods.” Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament, including the food laws. This is also why Jesus tells Peter in his vision, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (Acts 10:15).

V 21: ἔσθθεν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, “for from within, out of the heart of men.” The catalogue of vices that follows tells you why you should never follow your heart! Jesus focuses not on outward things but on the inward, the source of all defilements. When the heart is not holy, then whether you are guilty of these vices and appear evil or you ceremonially wash your hands as the Pharisees did and appear good, either way you are defiled because your heart is defiled. The parallel text in Matthew is used as one of the *sedes doctrinae* of original sin in the Formula of Concord (FC Ep I 21).

οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ ἐκπορεύονται, “come evil thoughts.” From these evil thoughts we have an appositional restating that describes the kind of evil thoughts that come from the defiled heart. In the Greek of verses 21–22, notice that not only the evil thoughts are in the plural but so also are the first six vices, which are translated as “sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness.” This indicates that these are not one-time occurrences that come from a person but are many and diverse. The last six vices in verse 22 are in the singular; perhaps to speak not of actions but of an attitude related to the actions.

V 23: πονηρά, “evil things.” This word for evil conveys not just the state of being evil but also the activity of evil thoughts and works.

Sermon Outline

Introduction: “Just follow your heart.” Undoubtedly you’ve heard this popular advice from someone before. But even those who are not Christians know it’s terrible advice. Secular psychologists, for instance, say that to follow your heart can lead to disaster, since the heart is the seat of the emotions, and following every positive or negative feeling could get you to make some bad decisions. Some of these psychologists suggest you should follow your head or your gut instead, the seats of the intellect and intuition. But we Christians disagree with this solution too.

We disagree because while we believe the heart is sinful and shouldn’t be followed, we also believe the sinful heart is the source of a sinful intellect and intuition, a sinful understanding and will. That’s actually the way the Scriptures speak of the heart. Thus, the solution to “Just follow your heart” cannot be “Just follow your intellect” or “Just follow your intuition.” Both of these are defiled as well. The only real solution is God acting outside of us and for our benefit. And that is what he does!

GOD TAKES OUR DEFILED HEARTS AND CREATES CLEAN, FRUITFUL HEARTS BY HIS GOSPEL.

- I. Every heart is by nature defiled and yields only evil.
 - A. The Pharisees and scribes lived as if something else defiled people.
 1. They had asked Jesus why his disciples ate without washing their hands, against the tradition of the elders, thinking this defiled them (7:1–5).
 2. They believed and lived as if what defiled a person is what goes into him—like the right foods eaten the right ways—which are really mere outward works, even those invented by man instead of those commanded by God.
 3. They taught others to do the same, profaning the name of God among us.
 - B. Jesus corrected the crowd’s false belief out of tender love for them.
 1. He had quoted Isaiah to the scribes and Pharisees to call out their hypocrisy: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (7:6).
 2. He teaches the crowd that “there is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him” (v 15).
 3. Jesus did not want the crowd misled by the moralism of the Pharisees.
 - C. Jesus corrected the disciples’ false belief to prepare them to teach others the same.
 1. He teaches the disciples that it is not what goes into a person that defiles him, since what goes in enters not the heart but the stomach and exits to the latrine.

LABOR DAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2024

The Lord Be with You!

Ruth 2

Rev. Mark B. Anderson, Pastor,
Grace Lutheran Church, Everett, Washington

Sermon Outline

THE BLESSINGS OF LABOR ARISE FROM THE STORY OF GOD'S MERCY IN CHRIST.

- I. Boaz, who hired, and those who labored for him reflect God's blessings.
- II. And buried within those mutual blessings is the story of God's mercy in Christ through Ruth.

Sermon

On September 5, 1882, America witnessed the very first celebration of Labor Day in New York City. Did you know, though, that the founder of Labor Day was disputed? Two men—Peter McGuire and Matthew Maguire—laid claim to initiating Labor Day in 1882. According to history, Peter McGuire claimed to have suggested the holiday for “the laboring classes.” But Matthew Maguire also laid claim to the idea of Labor Day, in 1882 as well.

While history credits one or the other of these men with founding this holiday, it was President Grover Cleveland who signed the bill in 1882 that created it. The *Paterson Morning Call* had an op-ed piece that seems to have settled the matter. The op-ed read in part, “The souvenir pen should go to Alderman Matthew Maguire of this city, who is the undisputed author of Labor Day as a holiday.” Both McGuire and Maguire were in attendance for that first Labor Day celebration in New York City (“History of Labor Day,” Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/general/laborday/history> [accessed February 27, 2024]). Labor Day has been celebrated in our country ever since then.

Labor has not always been something that was celebrated. Ever since the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden, one of the results was labor becoming unpleasant. “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:17–19).

On this Labor Day weekend, we want to look at a story from the book of Ruth that gives a proper view of labor. The story comes from Ruth 2, when Ruth is gleaning the fields. The writer of Ruth tells us, “And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, ‘The LORD be with you!’ And they answered, ‘The LORD bless you’” (v 4). The greeting of Boaz, and the response of the reapers, shows a right attitude toward those in charge and those who work for him. As the story goes on, Ruth’s situation reveals the mercy of God.

THE BLESSINGS OF LABOR ARISE FROM THE STORY OF GOD'S MERCY IN CHRIST.

I.

When it comes to being in charge, there are two attitudes that seem to prevail toward the workers underneath the one in charge. The first attitude—and the wrong one—is to be overbearing. After all, the ones under you are “nobodies” who are there to meet quotas and make money for the owner. This can result in the one in charge becoming tyrannical and even intimidating. Workers will not dare argue with the one in charge for fear of demotion, loss of opportunity, or even loss of their job.

The other option for a person in charge is to care for your workers underneath you. In your eyes, they are not “nobodies” or failures, but real people—people God created! Your workers are people whom God planned for before there was a heaven or earth. It is no accident that they are employed by you. God knew that this day would come.

These people under you also have a skill set your company needs. Some of those skill sets are obvious. Some workers have talent that just stands out. There are those who work hard and get the job done. Of course, there is that other worker—the one who struggles every day, or so it seems. It’s easy to take advantage of a person like this. The apostle James, however, lays down a warning for those who mistreat their laborers: “Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (James 5:4).

Corporate earnings and stock shares have always seemed to rule the day. However, God’s heart has always looked out for the laboring class of workers. There are two specific times in the Old Testament where God protects the laborers. One of those times is found in Leviticus 19. There, Moses writes, “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of the hired worker shall not remain with you all night till the morning” (Lev 19:13).

When Moses gave the Law a second time, he brought this subject up in the hearing of the entire nation of Israel. In the covenant they made with God on that day, Moses told the children of Israel, “You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin” (Deut 24:15).

Are you a business owner? Are you a boss who hires or supervises workers? You should take heed how you treat those who labor for you. It may seem as if nobody is watching. It may appear as if nobody even cares as long as profits are strong. Nothing could be further from the truth!

The reapers working for Boaz showed a God-pleasing attitude toward Boaz as they responded to his greeting by saying, “The LORD bless you.” In our “me first” culture, those words sound like a foreign language. However, those with a “me first” attitude fail to grasp the significance of the reapers’ response to Boaz.

Israel was, by and large, an agricultural country. They made their living by working the land. God told Moses the land was “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8). Everyone who made his living by agriculture depended on a good harvest.

Boaz certainly depended on a good harvest. For Boaz—or any landowner in Israel—not to have a good harvest had far-reaching consequences. If the owners did not have a good harvest, it would hurt everyone. Those consequences would reach all the way to the laborers in the field. Their income and livelihood would be affected by a bad harvest. However, a good harvest would bless the owner. It would also bless every person who worked for that owner year after year. A good harvest blessed the ones who owned the fields as well as those who worked in them.

Therefore, it was in everyone’s best interest—the laborers as well as the owners—to say, “The Lord bless you.” When God blessed the owners of the field, he also blessed by extension those working in them.

II.

There is, however, an even greater blessing buried within this story. The harvest blessings arise from the story of God’s grace and mercy—ultimately, the very story of our salvation.

The story of Boaz greeting the laborers in the field and their response to him has something buried within that story. That “something” is the story of God’s mercy as seen through Boaz and Ruth.

In order to grasp fully the depths of God’s mercy, we need to take a step back in family history. What God commanded regarding two groups of people, the Canaanites and the Moabites, touches both sides of the family. God, through the prophet Moses in Deuteronomy 20, commanded that the children of Israel destroy the Canaanites because they

were an idolatrous people (Deut 20:17). However, when the children of Israel came and sent spies into the land, it was Rahab, a harlot and a Canaanite woman, who hid them on her roof. She did so only after receiving a promise from the spies to spare her and her family when they invaded Jericho. Her life was spared, and she became the mother of Boaz.

Then we come to Ruth’s story. Ruth was a Moabite. When Moses gave the Law a second time, he said, “No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter” (Deut 23:3). Though Ammon and Moab were relatives of Israel through Abraham’s nephew Lot, they had not welcomed the Israelites as they approached the Promised Land. Thus, God forbade them to be a part of his people.

So how did Ruth get past this prohibition? She lived in Moab. However, Naomi, an Israelite, came with her husband and two sons to live there during a drought. Ruth married one of those sons. Over the course of time, her husband died, her brother-in-law died, and Naomi’s husband died. Naomi returned to Israel, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, moved from the country of Moab with her. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest (Ruth 1:22). If Ruth had not married Naomi’s son, this story would never have happened. But since she did, she had the right to bear a son from the nearest of kin. When the nearest of kin turned that down, Boaz, who was also a close relative of her deceased husband, stepped in and married her.

Boaz and Ruth had a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse, who then had a son named David. Many years later, there would be a baby born from David’s line by the name of Jesus.

For many years, the Jews had lived by the Law of Moses, but they could not fulfill it. As much as they labored to bring forth the harvest of righteousness and holiness the Law demands, they simply were unable to do so. Try as we might, we cannot either. On our own, we can labor all our lives and never be made right by following the Law. We simply cannot work our way into God’s favor.

What neither the Jewish people nor we could do, despite all our efforts and labor, Jesus did for us. He kept God’s Law—all of it—in our place. He then did the one work none of us can do by offering himself as the sinless sacrifice for all sins. His blood shed on the cross forgives us for all the times we have had the wrong attitude toward those either over us or under us. Our guilt is washed away in his blood. Through Jesus’ suffering and death, we are forgiven, once for all. His resurrection is the guarantee that we will live forever because of him. All of what Jesus labored to do on the cross and by walking out of the tomb on Easter is ours in our baptism. That is the real story of Labor Day. In spite of our family history and background, by faith in Christ, we are indeed children of God. We are a part of his forever family,

**PENTECOST 15 (PROPER 17),
SEPTEMBER 1, 2024**

Create in Me a Clean Heart

Text: Mark 7:14-23

Visual: *Lutheran Service Book*, baptismal font

Summary: The liturgy teaches us that God creates in us a new, clean heart by forgiving us for Jesus' sake.

Rev. Stephen K. Preus, Pastor,
Trinity Lutheran Church, Vinton, Iowa

This morning, we're going to learn more about why we use this important book. What am I holding? *Show hymnal*. We use this book every Sunday, don't we? Yes, because it guides us in what we say to God and what God says to us.

Show children page 151. Here, at the beginning of the service, we say to God the confession of sin. We say, "Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean." *Put hand over your heart*. Put your hand on your heart. This heart of mine and that heart of yours are "unclean" because of sin. So at the beginning of the service, God wants us to say that we have "unclean," sinful hearts.

Why does he want us to say that? *Receive responses*. Right. So that he can make our hearts clean! Would we want God to make our hearts clean if we didn't know our hearts were unclean? No! Would you wash your hands if you didn't think they were dirty? No! But when you say to God that your hearts are "unclean," he cleans them! He cleans them by forgiving them. Yes, "God in his mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins." As the pastor, I speak for Jesus and give you the forgiveness he won for you on the cross. And this forgiveness, which you believe in, makes your hearts clean before God. God says that to you!

As the hymnal says, I forgive you "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Does that remind you of anything else that happens at church? *Direct their attention to the baptismal font*. Yes, it reminds you of Baptism. Whenever you hear the pastor say the word of forgiveness "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," remember that you are a baptized child of God. Remember your heart is washed clean before him!

You want to stay clean too. That's why we sing a beautiful hymn from this important book. *Show pages 192-93*. Here we sing to God, asking him to create in us a clean heart. Every day, we want to live as his obedient children who have new, clean hearts through Jesus' forgiveness. Let's close with that.

Sing or say with the children the Offertory.

**PENTECOST 16 (PROPER 18),
SEPTEMBER 8, 2024**

Looking Forward to the Resurrection and Life

Text: Isaiah 35:4-7a

Visual: *Lutheran Service Book*

Summary: We are looking forward to "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come," the great reversal of what sin has brought upon us all.

Rev. Stephen K. Preus, Pastor,
Trinity Lutheran Church, Vinton, Iowa

What are you looking forward to? *Allow answers and repeat for all to hear*. Those all definitely sound like things to look forward to. But there's one thing every Christian is looking forward to most of all. In fact, every week we say we're looking forward to it. *Show hymnal and the Nicene Creed on the back binding*. Right here in the Creed that we confess each week, we say we're looking forward to something spectacular: "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." That is what we're all looking forward to.

Now, why would we be looking forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come? *Allow and repeat answers*. In our reading from Isaiah, we heard about what will happen in the resurrection and the life of the world to come. Jesus will return and get rid of all the evil in this world. He'll save us. And all those who were blind will be able to see. All who were deaf will be able to hear. All who were unable to walk will leap like a deer. All who couldn't talk will sing for joy. Any problem with your body or the bodies of any believer will no longer be a problem. All that's wrong with the world will go away. There will be no sin, no Satan, no sorrow, no sickness, no suffering. There will be nothing but joy and gladness with Jesus and all who trust in him. Something to look forward to, isn't it!

Why can we be so certain Jesus will do this for us? Because of what he already did. *Point back to the Nicene Creed*. Here in the Creed, we say who Jesus is. He is the "Son of God" who "was made man." Why? So he could be "crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate." On the cross, he died for our sins. And then on "the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures." So, "just as he is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity" (Small Catechism, Second Article), all believers in Christ will rise to eternal life too.

What are you looking forward to? Together: "The resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen."

Index—Volume 34, 2023–2024

Concordia Pulpit Resources

The final column refers to the part or issue number of volume 34, followed by the page number on which the sermon/article begins.

TITLES OF ARTICLES

Christocentric: What Does This Mean? Part 1: One Lord Jesus Christ	1.8
Christocentric: What Does This Mean? Part 2: The Formative Power of Preaching the Ascension	2.9
Christocentric: What Does This Mean? Part 3: Exposing Cultural Deceits	3.8
Christocentric: What Does This Mean? Part 4: For Us . . . and for Our Salvation	4.8
God's Promise for a Speechless Church: Hans Joachim Iwand and His Project of Sermon Meditations after World War II	1.12
Preaching First-Person Narrative Sermons, Part 1	3.13
Preaching First-Person Narrative Sermons, Part 2	4.12
Saying What Matters: Law and Gospel in Hans Joachim Iwand's Preaching Work	2.13

SERMON STUDY TEXTS AND SUNDAYS

Genesis 2:18–25	Pentecost 20	4.31
Genesis 9:8–17	Pentecost 10	3.42
Exodus 16:2–15	Pentecost 11	3.44
Exodus 34:29–35	Transfiguration of Our Lord	1.42
1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)	Epiphany 2	1.32
1 Kings 19:1–8	Pentecost 12	3.47
Job 38:1–11	Pentecost 5	3.27
Proverbs 9:1–10	Pentecost 13	3.49
Isaiah 35:4–7a	Pentecost 16	4.19
Isaiah 40:1–11	Advent 2	1.18
Isaiah 61:10–62:3	Christmas 1	1.26
Jeremiah 11:18–20	Pentecost 18	4.25
Ezekiel 37:1–14	Day of Pentecost	2.52
Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14	Last Sunday of the Church Year: Christ the King	4.53
Jonah 3:1–5, 10	Epiphany 3	1.34
Matthew 11:12–19	Reformation Day (Observed)	4.40
Mark 1:9–15	Lent 1	2.17
Mark 5:21–43	Pentecost 6	3.30
Mark 6:1–13	Pentecost 7	3.33
Mark 6:14–29	Pentecost 8	3.36
Mark 6:30–44	Pentecost 9	3.39
Mark 7:1–13	Pentecost 14	3.51
Mark 7:14–23	Pentecost 15	4.16
Mark 9:14–29	Pentecost 17	4.22
Mark 13:1–13	Pentecost 26	4.49
Mark 16:1–8	Easter Day	2.32
Luke 1:26–38	Advent 4	1.23
Luke 24:44–53	Ascension of Our Lord	2.47

John 1:6–8, 19–28	Advent 3	1.20
John 2:13–22 (23–25)	Lent 3	2.22
John 3:14–21	Lent 4	2.24
John 10:11–18	Easter 4	2.40
John 12:20–43	Palm Sunday	2.29
John 15:9–17	Easter 6	2.45
Acts 2:14a, 22–36	The Holy Trinity	3.17
Acts 3:11–21	Easter 3	2.37
Acts 4:32–35	Easter 2	2.35
Acts 8:26–40	Easter 5	2.43
Romans 5:1–11	Lent 2	2.19
Romans 6:1–11	The Baptism of Our Lord	1.29
1 Corinthians 1:3–9	Advent 1	1.16
1 Corinthians 8:1–13	Epiphany 4	1.37
1 Corinthians 9:16–27	Epiphany 5	1.40
2 Corinthians 4:5–12	Pentecost 2	3.19
2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1	Pentecost 3	3.21
2 Corinthians 5:1–10 (11–17)	Pentecost 4	3.24
Hebrews 3:12–19	Pentecost 21	4.34
Hebrews 4:1–13 (14–16)	Pentecost 22	4.37
Hebrews 5:1–10	Lent 5	2.27
Hebrews 9:24–28	Pentecost 25	4.46
1 John 5:9–15	Easter 7	2.50
Revelation 7:(2–8) 9–17	All Saints' Day (Observed)	4.43
Revelation 12:7–12	St. Michael and All Angels	4.28

SERMON SERIES DAYS AND TEXTS

Advent Midweek–Christmas Series	
Pss 80; 85; 126; 89:1–5; 110:1–4; 98	1.46–53
For Church Workers and Their Families	
Jn 21:1–14; 21:15–19; Rev 5:1–14; 1 Cor 9:5	3.54–60
Lenten Midweek Series	
Jn 18:1–11; 18:12–27; 18:28–40; 19:1–16a; 19:16b–27; 19:28–42	2.55–62
Sermons of God's Justice	
Zech 7:8–14; Matt 23:23–28; Deut 24:17–22	1.54–56

SPECIAL SERMON DAYS AND TEXTS

Ash Wednesday	Mt 6:1–6, 16–21	2.63
Canada Day	Lam 3:22–26; Mk 5:21–43	3.65
Christmas Day	Jn 1:1–14	1.61
Christmas Eve	Lk 2:4–7	1.59
Epiphany of Our Lord	Mt 2:1–12	1.65
Feast of St. Andrew	Jn 1:35–42a	1.57
Funeral Sermon	Rom 6:3–11; 2 Cor 4:7–18; Jn 5:19–29	3.71
Funeral Sermon for a Pastor Father		
	Is 43:1–3a; 1 Jn 2:1–2; Lk 15	4.68
Funeral Sermon for a Pastor's Wife	Jn 11:17–27	4.67
Good Friday	Mk 15:33–34	2.66
Labor Day	Ruth 2	4.57
Last Sunday of the Church Year: Sunday of Fulfillment		
	Mk 13:24–37	4.60
Maundy Thursday	Lk 14:12–14	2.64
Mother's Day	Jn 17:11b–19	2.68