



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

### Lesson #2

#### **B. Examples of New Testament Sermons**

##### **1. Peter's Sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41)**

One of the best ways to learn something is to follow the example of those who know how to do it. A person can learn how to be a carpenter from someone who is a good carpenter. So if we want to know how to preach God's Word, we can learn from someone who is a good preacher. Jesus trained His apostles for a period of over three years. They saw and heard what He did by following Him around, and after a time He sent them out to preach His Word. On his mission journeys the apostle Paul also had partners who worked with him and learned from him. Some were more or less equal partners, like Barnabas and Silas, but there were also younger men like Timothy, Titus, Mark, and Luke, whom Paul trained. The apostle Peter also had Mark as his helper, and there were probably others as well.

Let us take a look at some of the preaching done by Peter and Paul, as recorded in the book of Acts, and let us learn from their sermons how to preach the Word. This is how Timothy and Mark and others learned how to preach the Word in their time.

The first New Testament sermon recorded in the Bible from the apostles is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter was addressing a large crowd of Jewish people from Jerusalem, from other places in the Roman Empire and even from beyond the Roman Empire. Because it was the feast of Pentecost, there were Jewish people present from many other countries who had traveled to Jerusalem for this important Jewish festival. Among those present were the very men who were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

As we examine Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36, we notice that much of what Peter said was a direct quotation of Old Testament passages from the prophets Joel and David. Peter explained how these passages foretold events that had just taken place in the death and resurrection of Jesus and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From Peter's example we can learn that we also should quote and explain God's Word, because God has given His Word to us in the Holy Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This, of course, assumes that we have read, studied and understood the Bible passages that we are using. There is no better preparation for preaching God's Word than reading and rereading the portion of the Bible on which we are preaching until its meaning is clear to us. If we do not understand something in the Bible, we should not use that Bible passage in our preaching until we do understand it. We should rather quote and explain those passages that we fully understand.

Peter's sermon in Acts 2 was directed at persons who were guilty of crucifying Jesus; therefore, Peter told them that they had sinned grievously against their God. **"Him (Jesus) ... you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death"** (Acts 2:23). Peter repeated this charge in Acts 2:36 when he spoke of **"this Jesus, whom you crucified."** Following Peter's example in our own sermons, we also must inform our listeners of their sins. Of course, we cannot accuse them of sins of which they are not guilty, or of those of which we have no knowledge. Peter knew that many in his audience had called for Jesus' crucifixion, and so he spoke plainly about their sin. There are certain sins of which we are all guilty; we only have to examine ourselves and our own sins to know what these sins are. The better we know the persons whom we are addressing, the better we will be able to call attention to the sins they are guilty of.

But Peter was not interested in calling attention to their sin just for the sake of having them confess their sin. Peter was eager to bring to them the cure for their sins in the person and work of the Man whom they had crucified. For that reason, Peter reminded them of who Jesus was: **“Jesus of Nazareth, attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know”** (Acts 2:22). Peter knew that most of his listeners were well-acquainted with the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus had traveled throughout the land of the Jews for over three years. His miracles were well-known, even though some of their leaders tried to explain them away. They should have known better than to condemn and crucify someone like Jesus, who was obviously doing things that only God can do.

But above all, Peter wanted to impress on them one main fact about Jesus. They had indeed **“put Him to death,”** but Him **“God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it”** (Acts 2:24). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the main thing that Peter wanted to get across. Indeed, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the main thing every preacher of God's Word wants to get across. This is the Good News; this is the Gospel. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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”** (1 Corinthians 15: 1-4).

Every time we have an opportunity to speak to a group of Christians or non-Christians, we should call attention to the fact that we, as well as our audience, are sinners who have sinned against God and deserve His punishment. But, above all, we should bring them the Good News of Jesus, that is, who He is, what He has done, and the benefit for us: the forgiveness of our sins. This is the center of our message: Jesus died for our sins, He was buried and rose again, and because of what He did, God forgives our sins. The Holy Spirit works through the law and Gospel we speak to bring about repentance for the sin we have committed and to produce faith in Jesus as the Savior from sin.

The last sentence in Peter's address was this: **“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36). Jesus' death by crucifixion did not mean He was a failure. Not at all! By raising Him from the dead and taking Him up to heaven forty days later, God exalted Him and set Him at His right-hand side, in glory and power.

The result of Peter's preaching was that **“they were cut to the heart”** (Acts 2:37). They realized what they had done and asked the apostles: **“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”** (Acts 2:37). Peter was quick to respond with the words: **“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call”** (Acts 2: 38-39). Repentance is a turn-about, a change in direction. In this case, it was a change from hating Christ and crucifying Him to believing that He rose from the dead and that He is indeed the promised Messiah and Savior, that He is indeed both Lord and Christ. Peter then offered the greatest blessing of all and the very thing Jesus came into the world to accomplish. He presented to them **“the remission of sins.”** He did this by calling on every one of them to be baptized in Jesus' name. For baptism is one of God's ways to deliver the gift Jesus won for all.

What we have in the book of Acts is only a portion of what Peter and the other apostles said that day. We read: **“With many other words he testified and exhorted them”** (Acts 2:40). Notice what the Holy Spirit accomplished through Peter's preaching: **“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them”** (Acts 2:41).

The power of God is in His Word. When we preach His Word, the Holy Spirit is active and brings about a knowledge of sin and then an acceptance of Jesus as Savior and a glad receiving of the Good News of forgiveness. Three thousand were brought to faith in Jesus on that day. No doubt there were also some

in the crowd that rejected Peter's message. This is what happens whenever the Gospel is preached. There are some who are led to accept it by the Holy Spirit, and there are others who reject it.

It is important to remember that we *ourselves* can accomplish nothing by our preaching. It is the Holy Spirit who works through His Word when it is spoken to bring about the conviction of sin and a turning to Christ in faith. When there are persons in our audience who are already believers in Christ, the preaching of God's Word convicts them also of sin and strengthens their faith in Jesus.

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit changed the lives of about three thousand persons through the preaching of God's Word. The Holy Spirit may bring about similar results through our preaching of God's Word today, but this is not what usually happens. Sometimes there are very few visible results of our preaching, and we may become discouraged. But did everyone accept Jesus' preaching? Did not Peter and Paul and all the other apostles face serious opposition to their preaching of the Word? Regardless of the outcome of our preaching, our Lord says to us: **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine”** (2 Timothy 4: 2-3). God's promise remains in effect: **“As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it”** (Isaiah 55: 10-11).

### Questions

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1. How did Jesus' apostles learn how to preach God's Word?
2. Who was the main speaker among the apostles on Pentecost?
3. What kind of audience was present on the day of Pentecost?
4. Which Old Testament Scriptures were quoted in that Pentecost sermon?
5. What confidence should we have when we quote from the Bible?
6. What kind of Bible passages should we use in our preaching?
7. What are the two main teachings of the Bible that were present in Peter's Pentecost sermon?
8. What strong accusation did Peter bring against his listeners?
9. What kind of sins should we bring up in our preaching?
10. What is the purpose of talking about people's sins in a sermon?
11. What should always be the main topic in our preaching?
12. What did Peter want his listeners to believe and receive?
13. How did the Holy Spirit bless Peter's preaching?
14. What two kinds of persons will be present in most audiences?
15. What do all listeners need to hear in every sermon?
16. Why should we not be discouraged when the results of our preaching fall short of our hopes and expectations?

Read Acts 3-4, Acts 10.