

## Ten Parameters of Lutheran Preaching

1. Preaching is important. God instituted the office of preaching to obtain faith. *Augsburg Confession*, Article V.
  - a. Through preaching, God gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when God wills, in those who hear the Gospel. *Augsburg Confession*, Article V.
  - b. “Only under extraordinary circumstances would the sermon be omitted from the Sunday and festival service of Holy Communion. ELCA, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 9a.
2. Preaching is a “spoken” and “heard” event.
  - a. "But the word ‘ears’ is emphatic and forceful to an extraordinary degree; for in the new law all those countless burdens of the ceremonies, that is, dangers of sins, have been taken away. God no longer requires the feet or the hands or any other member; God requires only the ears. To such an extent has everything been reduced to an easy way of life. For if you ask a Christian what the work is by which he becomes worthy of the name “Christian,” he will be able to give absolutely no other answer than that it is the hearing of the Word of God, that is, faith. Therefore the ears alone are the organs of a Christian, for he is justified and declared to be a Christian, not because of the works of any member but because of faith." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 29, Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews (Heb 10:5).
  - b. “Preaching is the living and contemporary voice of one who interprets in all the Scriptures the things concerning Jesus Christ. In fidelity to the readings appointed for the day, the preacher proclaims our need of God’s grace and freely offers that grace, equipping the community for mission and service in daily life. ELCA, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 9a.
  - c. The point is that the Word of God comes from outside us, not that we need to physically hear it.
3. We preach Jesus Christ and not the Bible. Scripture is the cradle of Christ. Christ reigns over Scripture.
  - a. The Gospel is the promise of John 3:16 and this promise is our hermeneutic. Preaching is the place where promises are spoken and not where Scripture is explained.
  - b. At the same time: "The preaching of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ is rooted in the readings of the Scriptures in the assemblies for worship." ELCA, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 8.

4. Our preaching is in accordance with the creeds and confessions of the Church.
  - a. Notice that we promise to preach and teach and not to believe. We will have doubts and dark nights of the soul; we don't work these things out in the pulpit.
  - b. We need to know the creeds and confessions
    - i. Be clear about the questions the creeds and confessions are meant to address and the ones they are not.
    - ii. "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." (The Small Catechism)
5. We preach Good News.
  - a. Justification by grace through faith is the norm for the content of Lutheran preaching.
  - b. It is not enough merely to include the phrase or to explain it theologically. We proclaim the Gospel as good news, as a promise that means something to *these* hearers.
6. We preach Christ crucified and not a theology of glory.
  - a. The issue is where we encounter God. We encounter God in Christ crucified.
  - b. At the same time, we are careful how we preach the cross. Christ's cross is not a call to passive acceptance of human suffering and injustice; Jesus' entire life is an active engagement with the powers that cause human suffering. Jesus did not sacrifice himself; he was sacrificed.
  - c. The cross is not a theological proposition that we have to believe or be damned.
7. Lutheran preaching includes both Law and Gospel.
  - a. "Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate. The proclamation of God's message to us is both Law and Gospel. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Through the Word in these forms, as through the sacraments, God gives faith, forgiveness of sins, and new life." ELCA, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 5.

- b. Law and Gospel implies much more than the simple movement from making people feel guilty to relieving them of their guilt. Guilt in preaching presumes a Christian culture. Law is about God's purpose for and relationship with a humanity created in God's image. We preach good news and not legalism.
  - c. "What about preaching sin?" I am regularly asked, often by younger preachers. I don't think that it works to convince people that they are sinful, or that they ought to feel sinful. At its best, preaching holds up a mirror in such a way that people say: "That's me! That's us! That's the world!" People who get sin, who claim the psalmist's words as their own, don't need convincing. And people who don't get sin, who have never voiced the psalmist's cry, cannot be convinced.
    - i. "Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life." (Ps 31:9-13 NRSV)
8. Lutheran preaching is as concerned with vocation, responding to God in this world today, as it is with getting people ready to arrive at the pearly gates.
- a. Our relationship with God in Christ cannot be separated from our relationship with the world.
  - b. "By God's gift, the Word and the sacraments are set in the midst of the world, for the life of the world." ELCA, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 51b.
  - c. Baptism comes to expression in Christian vocation. The Word of God leads Christians to lived prayer. The Holy Communion strengthens us to witness and to work for justice.
9. Lutheran preaching takes many forms.
- a. Inside the Church, "proclamation of the Word includes the public reading of Scripture, preaching, teaching, the celebration of the sacraments, confession and absolution, music, arts, prayers, Christian witness, and service." ELCA, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 5a
  - b. Outside the Church, the most significant proclamation of the Gospel is not by preachers in pulpits but by the baptized as they carry out their Christian

vocations in the world. In this sense, preaching empowers the baptized to proclaim the Gospel.

10. Lutherans are concerned to preach in the vernacular, in the language of the people. At the same time, we recognize that language and medium shape the message and so we are concerned to remain true to the Gospel.