

LECTIONARY HOMILETICS

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INSTRUCTIONS: SERMON REVIEWS

CONTENT

- 1) Basically, you are to summarize the “best” sermons on the lesson. (A list of possible resources is included to help you find them.) Please see the samples for examples of two ways to do this. You might want to structure your essay differently. Another way would be to arrange the summaries under the different types of sermons (doctrinal, expository, etc.). Your job is not so much to critique the sermons, but you might want to reflect on the setting and impact of the sermon at the time in history (for example, sermons from the sixties often reflect the unrest of those years). If you see helpful stories, images, metaphors, analogies, illustrations, please include those in the summaries. Most pastors are hungry for illustrative material. You might also want to have a summarizing paragraph to point out the similarities or differences of the sermons you have reviewed.
- 2) Exegetical material on the lesson will be addressed by another writer, so please do not include this in your material.
- 3) Remember that you are writing to an **ecumenical** audience. You may certainly reference movements within particular traditions, but be aware that your readership is broad-ranging.
- 4) Please use your unique background; however, avoid professional jargon. Draw on your knowledge of recent trends in scholarship, but make it accessible to the pastor in the pulpit.
- 5) Keep in mind the **liturgical season**.
- 6) Provide **proper documentation** for your sources (author, publisher, year, etc.). Do not submit copyrighted material; when quoting another source, be careful not to quote more than fifty words from any particular source. However, this “fifty-word rule” does not apply to smaller works (such as poems). In that case, only quote a *relatively small portion*. Also remember that *hymns are copyrighted*; quoting verses of hymns requires us to pay the copyright holder (which we are willing to do if a really good point is being made). Be *particularly careful* to provide full URLs (website addresses) when referring to online material.
- 7) Be parsimonious in your use of footnotes and quotations. Readers are interested in your thoughts and analysis.
- 8) Try to use language that reflects the value of all persons. Avoid the awkward constructions him/her, he/she, etc. Instead, consider using single gender examples or illustrations from real life, which include a multi-gendered presentation. If you are using a “clinical example,” please use a fictitious name.
- 9) Use active verbs whenever you can. Active verbs energize the reader and the listener.
- 10) Do not begin sentences with “And” and rarely begin a sentence with “But.”
- 11) Use complete sentences (subject + verb).
- 12) Essay length: 800 to 1000 words.

FORMAT

- 1) Please send your essays on diskette along with a hard copy, or send as an e-mail attachment. If you cannot send an electronic version, your essays will be scanned which requires a **quality, double-spaced** hard (paper) copy.
- 2) The preferred word processing program is *MSWord* although *WordPerfect* is acceptable.
- 3) Page numbering can be used but do not use headers or footers.
- 4) Use an em-dash — not double hyphens — for emphasis. No space between words and—dash (In *Word* the em-dash is Ctrl [key] + Alt [key] + - [minus sign on numeric keypad]).
- 5) Italicize the titles of books, plays, magazines, etc. Do not underline. Songs, poems, and articles take quotation marks.
- 6) Use **one** space after a period, question mark, and colon.
- 7) Quotation marks go **after** punctuation at the end of a sentence, but inverted commas (single quotation marks) go **before** punctuation. “For instance, when ‘quoting within a quote’.” In notes and between parentheses, use brief abbreviations for books of the Bible with no periods. Example: Mk 2:1-17. In the text of your essay, spell out books of the Bible.
- 8) Use the following format for citing verses within parentheses. For a single verse: v. 18. For multiple verses: vv. 5-11.
- 9) Place all notes at end of each essay and *not* at the bottom of each page. Follow the basic format of these examples for books, plays, and magazines. Note p. for one page and pp. for multiple pages.

NOTES

1. Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 45.
2. Thomas War, “Openness to All,” *Weavings*, Vol. XI, No. 4, pp. 21-25.

Please contact the office if you have any further questions.

GUIDE FOR SERMON REVIEWS

Note: As many of our “Sermon Reviews” contributors are in the Mid-Atlantic region, we have prepared the following guide according to the collections of Union-PSCE in Richmond, VA. Most theological libraries carry these (and many other) excellent resources. If you are aware of other, better sources for us to use in advising contributors, please let us know!

Go to <http://library.union-psce.edu> for the William Smith Morton Library. Many of the resources are available by mail. If you know the name of the book or writer, call the extension office (804-355-0671), and they will mail free of charge.

A. Many of the sermons in the library are indexed in a textual index in the lobby of the library. This textual file will refer you to sermons in various books.

B. There are many excellent sermons in the Reigner Recording Library. These resources are also available by mail.

C. There are some specific books you might consult:

1. *The Christian Year: Sermons of the Fathers*, edited by George W. Forell (this is excellent). WQ 8.4 F71.
2. *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching: an encyclopedia of preaching*, edited by Clyde E. Fant, Jr., and William M. Pinson, Jr. Ref. WQ 2 F216.
3. *Augsburg Sermons*, published annually by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (follows the Revised Common Lectionary). WW 10 A921.
4. Books of sermons: (WQ—WW). Unfortunately, most of them are not indexed. Here are a few:
Paul Tillich, WW 10 T577
Paul Scherer, WW 10 S326
Harry Emerson Fosdick, WW 10 F748
Edmund A. Steimle, WW 10 S818
Ralph Sockman, WW 10 S678
George Buttrick, WW 10 B989.
Obviously you will not have time to look at all of these, but maybe you could find some of your personal favorites.
5. Here are several other good resources:
Best Sermons, edited by James W. Cox (one volume published annually) WW B561
Great Sermons of the 20th Century, edited by Peter F. Gunther
A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, edited by Philip Schaff. GE 75 W588 S
Sermons in American History, edited by DeWitte Holland. WQ 2.7 S486I.

D. On the Internet, there are several sites where sermons are indexed by passage:

<http://www.ccel.org>
<http://www.blacksermons.com>
<http://www.judsonpress.com/taap>
<http://sermoncentral.com>
<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermon.html>
<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/search/com-let.html>
<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/homiletics.htm>
<http://sys1.pitts.emory.edu/preach.html>
<http://www.chapel.duke.edu/sermons/default.htm>
<http://shamash.org/reform/uahc/congs/ky/ky001/Pulpit.html>
<http://sys1.pitts.emory.edu/bob/preachdisplay.html>
<http://ecusa.anglican.org/worship-that-works/>

SAMPLE ESSAY #1

This piece originally appeared in the February-March 2003 issue of *Lectionary Homiletics* (February 2, 2003: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, pp. 4-5).

Sermon Reviews

2 Kings 5:1-14

Jesus Has the Authority is how Mark Ellingsen titles his 1994 sermon on Mark 1:21-28. He raises the issue that few people today really believe that Jesus has the authority to heal or to forgive or to save us from death. Ellingsen compares Mark's story with a contemporary story about trying to exchange a Christmas present at the store. You are directed from one place to another throughout your exchange hassle until you arrive at the store manager's office. He listens to your need to exchange your gift only to respond, "Golly, I would really like to help you. But I just don't have the power when it comes to exchanges like that; I just have not got the authority."¹¹ According to Ellingsen, many Christians today confuse Jesus with the nice polite store manager who can only listen to your concern but has no authority to act on it. It's not that people lose their faith in Christ, but rather they wonder if he has the clout or the authority to do what he says he can do! Ellingsen ends his sermon with these words, "The message of this morning's Gospel is simply this: Jesus is not like that well-meaning, but powerless store manager. He is Lord of your life, who has the authority to do whatever he says he will,... Yes, Jesus has the authority to do whatever he says he will, and he has indeed willed to love you!"¹²

William Willimon develops his sermon on Mark's text around the theme of *The Teacher*.¹³ Mark reveals Jesus as the teacher who teaches with authority. For Willimon, teachers are powerful because they have the power to liberate, to enlighten and to heal. He shares personal stories of his own teachers and how their teaching still affects his life many years later. Willimon suggests that this is the source of power that teachers have: the

ability to change lives for the good. "Teachers are powerful people. They change lives. They create, through their teaching, new worlds. They have, within their hands, the power.... Teachers are powerful."¹⁴ The first miraculous work that Mark reports about Jesus is the act of teaching. Jesus is presented as a teacher with authority. Jesus the teacher healed the man possessed by an evil spirit. Willimon concludes his sermon with the proclamation that Mark presents Jesus as a teacher to reassure us: "[Y]ou have a teacher, one who teaches with authority. Come, be taught by him and be healed."¹⁵

Moving the sermon focus away from Jesus' authority and teaching, **Ann Hoch** presents her sermon from the perspective of the demon's question, *What Do You Want With Us, Jesus?*¹⁶ Hoch believes that the issue for the people in Mark's day, as well as ours, is the same: can you see in Jesus of Nazareth what the demon sees? Can you see in Jesus the complete will and purpose of God? The demon wants to know if Christ has come to destroy them and the answer is *Yes!* Christ has come to shatter the demonic designs on the world. Christ has come to free us from the chains of the devil. In Mark's story, there is no polite conversation between Jesus and the demon. The demon screams and Christ rebukes him. Jesus shouts, commands and orders. Hoch asks if we can recognize in Jesus the means of grace for each one of us. She concludes her sermon, "It is in worship that the faithful recognize in Jesus the means of grace and the will and purpose of God for your lives. That is the miracle of what Jesus wants with us. 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?' Everything, and it is urgent."¹⁷

George Buttrick's sermon, *The Authority of Jesus*, begins with a question asked by a young woman, "So many voices! Which shall I follow?" Buttrick suggests that there are many voices of authority in today's world making it very difficult for a person to hear the Voice. Some people follow the voice of authority in the church. The danger in this kind of listening is that the church is culturally

conditioned and sinful. The hope is that in the church we hear about Jesus. Other people follow the voice of authority in the Bible. The danger in biblical listening is that the Bible does not provide an instant answer to every problem a person encounters. The hope in biblical listening is that Christ is presented through the scriptures. Finally, some people follow the voice of authority found within the inner Self. Here the danger lies in the sinful nature of humanity; while the hope lies in the examples of prophetic minds in the past. Buttrick states that authority speaks through the church, through the Bible and through the human conscience. Yet it is only in Christ that authority originates. We discover this true authority by following Jesus. Buttrick ends his sermon with these words, "So she came asking, So many voices! Which shall I follow? It was the right question, for at last we prove authority only by following, only by our obedience."¹⁸

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NOTES

11. Mark Ellingsen, "Jesus Has the Authority," *Biblical Preaching Journal*, vol. 7 (Winter 1994), pp.17-19.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
13. William H. Willimon, "The Teacher," *Pulpit Resource*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January-March 1997), pp. 19-22.
14. *Ibid.*, p.20.
15. *Ibid.*, p.21.
16. Ann Hoch, "What do You Want With Us, Jesus?" *Pulpit Resource*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January-March 2000), pp.19-22.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
18. George A. Buttrick, "The Authority of Jesus," *Sermons Preached In A University Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1959), p. 86.

Sermon Reviews

John 14:23-29

In a sermon on John 14:23-27,⁹ Gregory the Great (540-604) remarks on the dwelling of God in the hearts of believers, recalling for his listeners how God “does indeed enter the hearts of some but does not make his home there.” By way of explanation, he notes how some people simply do not bother to clean their houses and that consequently, God does not, indeed cannot, remain with them. He reminds his listeners what constitutes belief; that is, a believer is one who loves God and shows that love in true repentance and faithfulness, for “if anyone loves me, he will keep my word.” The true believer, according to Gregory, is one who rightly hears the word of God exclaimed in Christ and knows that at the heart of true belief is love. He exhorts his listeners to examine their lives to see if love has found a home in their hearts. “God’s love is never idle. Where it exists, it does great things; if it refuses to work, it is not love.”

Like Gregory the Great, Martin Luther (1483-1546) sees a fundamental oneness in faith and love. In a house sermon on John 14:23-31 entitled *Holy Pentecost*,¹⁰ he remarks on their basic equivalency and mutuality. “Is it love, then, that matters, and not faith? The answer is, they are equivalent, for no one can love Christ if he does not believe and trust in him.” Similarly, “nothing is taken away from faith by what is said: instead its meaning and efficacy are intensified for us.”

Of course, to Luther’s mind, “If we don’t begin by loving Christ, it’s a lost cause.” Our efforts to live the Word more honorably will certainly fail, for “Where such love is not present, there my Word will not be retained over the long haul.” Hence, love and faith are really one and the same reality to him.

In two other of his sermons on this same text, specifically his first and second church sermons on *Pentecost, or the Festival of the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, Luther explains that teaching people to love is one

of the many ministries of the Holy Spirit. Particularly in his first sermon,¹¹ he reminds us that such a ministry requires much patience and perseverance on everyone’s part, for while Christian love has its beginnings in the love of God, learning to love as God loves takes time. “In all this...we ought to exercise sense and wisdom, understanding that a man receiving the Holy Spirit is not at once perfect...pure in all respects.” As far as he is concerned, “there must be struggling if the Holy Spirit is to abide in the heart, and let no one dare think it will be otherwise.” In the meantime, he encouragingly tells his listeners, they have the peace of Christ to comfort them. While the peace they have in Christ is not as the world seeks, that is, the actual removal of trouble or affliction, they nevertheless have the peace of Christ, a promised peace that will transform even death

SAMPLE ESSAY #2

This piece originally appeared in the
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(May 16, 2004: Sixth Sunday of Easter, pp. 46-7).

into life, as Christ himself underwent.

Although Luther and Gregory come from two different worlds, both clearly understood that grace is by no means cheap. In fact, in Gregory’s mind, “Our God is a consuming fire.”¹² For Luther, too, learning to love as Christ loves has its struggles. The good news is that learning the art of his love is made easier for those who desire it. People can grow in their understanding of the love to which they are called by the teaching of the Holy Spirit “who is with us, for the purpose of bearing witness to Christ and of reviving in our hearts what he has taught, that we may understand and believe it.”¹³ At the same time, the promised peace of Christ and the indwelling of Father and Son make the way of Christian love itself easier.

The significance of God as prime mover in the changing of hearts goes without saying. Not only does God first love us, God is love itself coming into its own to unveil for all time and eternity the very essence of the Triune God. The history of salvation that is reflected in this account mirrors this very love, as the text is the very love story of a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit both in terms of their love for one other and for the world of their creation.

John Calvin (1509-1564) makes this essential point in his exposition on this text in his *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*.¹⁴ He writes of the joy that the disciples should have experienced because Christ returned to the Father, as well as the joy his listeners should now know for this same reason. To his mind, his listeners needed to learn that the ultimate aim of salvation is to return to the Father with love. Hence, Christ told his disciples that he was going to the Father and the Father was the greater of the two, not in terms of a Son’s essential subordination, which is contrary to Christian teaching, but in terms of the aim of his disciples’ salvation. In other words, Christ’s ultimate aim and mission is to unite people to the God who is promised to be “all in all” (1 Cor 25:24). To Christ, a cup half full is simply not enough in the kingdom of God; for as Calvin himself noted, “Until we have reached that point, we are, as it were, in the middle of the course. We, too, imagine to ourselves but a half-Christ...if He does not lead us to God.”

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NOTES

9. Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 236-47.

10. Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, vol. 2, ed. Eugene F. A. Klug (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 177-84.

11. Cf. Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 272-87. Cf. also his second sermon on pages 287-97.

12. Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 240.

13. Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 284.

14. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, vol. 2, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, repr. 1996), 100-03. Cf. also George W. Forell, ed., *The Christian Year: Sermons of the Fathers*, vol. 1 (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 335-37.

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