

In Living Color

Narrative Rhetoric for a Lutheran Homiletic in the Digital Age

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SEVEN MINUTES. THAT'S IT. That's all a preacher gets nowadays. After that hands fidget, minds wander, and bodies are restless. Yes, 420 seconds is all that is left of the average attention span. That means seven short minutes is all that the average person is willing to listen to a sermon.¹ Exceed the given time limit and preachers are at the mercy of a congregation struggling with a digitally induced attention deficit disorder. Of course, most preachers do actually preach longer than seven minutes, but understanding how hearers are conditioned to listen and how long they are prone to remain engaged is vital for good preaching.

In any case, seven minutes is not very long to proclaim the law in all of its fury and teach it in all of its fullness. Nor is it much time to proclaim the gospel in all of its greatness and deliver it in all of its satisfying sweetness.² But seven minutes isn't even a guarantee. Should the preacher himself be a little lackluster that day (it has been known to happen, even among the best), or maybe his delivery skills tend to be more Bush (43) than Obama, or his oration more nervous teenager than fearless titan, many hearers are prone to tune out even sooner.

So how has it come to this? What happened to the attention spans of our time, and what does it mean for preachers today? Perhaps the first question can be initially explained through a simple experiment (which will be elaborated on later below): See if you can read this entire article without once looking at your smartphone, iPad, or computer. Try to ignore every beep, ding, chirp, and vibration coming from the flock of your electronic gadgets connected to the Net and circling around you.

What's the point? Recent studies on the effects of our digital world on the brain are increasingly showing how our high tech, ever-connected world is fundamentally altering the way our brains think, work, and process information, and therefore also changing how we behave, learn, and interact, including the reality of shortened attention spans.³ So if you can't read this essay all the way through without being distracted, it should be no surprise that people can't stay focused on a sermon for more than seven minutes.

The results of our ever-decreasing attention span in the church continue to accumulate: fewer souls are soothed, burdened consciences remain troubled, and biblical instruction

is not being retained, which means biblical literacy continues to decline. Worst of all, preachers and churches are becoming awkwardly and increasingly desperate to gain a listening audience. To try and coax people to listen, many pastors and congregations are taking their cues from the digital culture, turning pulpits into stages and movie theaters, bringing in tricked-out lighting with state-of-the-art digital computers and fancy movie editing software and movie screens; they utilize fog machines and props at just the right time—including cars and motorcycles—and even install zip lines for the pastor to zoom over the heads of the people on Easter Sunday, all so that they can appeal to that seven-minute attention span.

So what is a preacher intent on faithfully preaching the word of God to do? First, recognize that the power of God for the salvation of souls is in the gospel (Rom 1:16), not in any one age of culture or quality therein, be it the age of antiquity, the age of enlightenment, the modern age, the late modern age (postmodern), or the digital age.

Second, and more to the point of this essay: because there are countless examples of preachers and congregations trying something new, I propose that we recognize the digital diag-

1. Jeff Davidson, *The Complete Guide to Public Speaking* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 102.
2. Just to be clear, references to the law refer to the demands of God. Therefore the law refers to any proclamation that requires a hearer "to do" anything, period. Whether that is keeping the commandments, evangelism, forgiving someone else, or stewardship, anything that requires someone to do something is of the law. And whether first use, second use, or third use, it all remains the same law. We cannot control how the Spirit will work that law on a hearer's heart. The gospel, however, is everything that Jesus Christ has done for you, to you, and in you by his life of obedience and death on the cross, as well as lovingly delivered by his Holy Spirit through the oral and visible word (preaching and the sacraments). In other words, there are no conditions to the gospel. Zero. None. Zip. It is all completely and 100 percent pure gift. In short, the law says "do," and the gospel says "done."
3. "The Net engages all of our senses—except, so far, those of smell and taste—and it engages them simultaneously. The Net also provides a high-speed system for delivering responses and rewards—'positive reinforcements,' in psychological terms—which encourage the repetition of both physical and mental actions. The Net's interactivity . . . turns us into lab rats constantly pressing levers to get tiny pellets of social or intellectual nourishment" (Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011], 117).

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nosis of our time and rather than introducing something outrageously new, we try anew something very old. I suggest using the ancient art of rhetoric and oration as a means to bridge the digital attention gap and not only engage, but viscerally enthrall listeners with the propositional truth of God's law and gospel.

THE LOST ART OF RHETORIC

By one definition, “[r]hetoric is the art of influence, friendship, and eloquence, of ready wit and irrefutable logic.”⁴ It was first developed and refined by the ancients like Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero.

Aristotle is known to consider rhetoric as the art of discovering all the available means of persuasion. It was deemed so important that it was placed at the center of all higher education. In fact, the ancients considered rhetoric an essential skill that “taught them how to speak and write persuasively, produce something to say on every occasion, and make people like them when they spoke.”⁵ Without question, these are skills that would benefit every pastor and preacher. However, formal training in rhetoric has long been removed from most formal education curricula, with little to no consideration given to it in contemporary higher education, including most seminaries and their homiletics classes. Its loss has impoverished many a speaker and many a preacher. Reclaiming elements of this lost art would benefit pastors, politicians, and pundits alike, not to mention the whole of our digitally abbreviated (for example: BFF, FWIW, FYI, IMHO) and oratorically deficient society.

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More to the point, classic rhetoric employs the elements of *logos* or logical argument, *ethos* or speaker credibility, *pathos* or passionate argumentation, and *vividness* or imagination, to shape public speaking and construct a persuasive argument. Rhetoric was essentially the art of discourse, of systematically and artfully thinking about speaking.

For the purposes of this essay, I am going to limit consideration to the specific use of *pathos* (emotion) and *vividness* (imagination) in preaching as a remedy for the digitally distracted attention spans of our time. In short, it is my contention that the basis of effective preaching for our digital age is the responsible and faithful engagement of the emotion (pa-

thos) of the biblical text in a way that stimulates and evokes the imagination (*vividness*) of the hearers so as to bring into living color and high definition the proclamation of the law and the gospel.⁶

THE “OLD” AND “NEW” HOMILETICS REVISITED

First, we need a brief review of how this ancient rhetoric was once used in the Old Homiletic, as well as why it was deemed lacking, and subsequently replaced with the inductive and narrative means of the New Homiletic. Then, by bringing both the Old and New forms together and placing them under the Lutheran hermeneutic of law and gospel, plus introducing the rhetorical elements of *vividness* and emotion, we will build a rhetorical bridge of engagement to our digitally distracted listeners. Along the way, a helpful framework for a contemporary Lutheran homiletic will begin to emerge.

According to general consensus, sermons prior to the modern era were crafted around a general “conceptual method” that dominated preaching for the two prior centuries.⁷ The Old Homiletic involved the development of an argument in support of a basic idea. “The preacher either explores a topic or ‘distills’ from the text a *basic idea* or *proposition*, which becomes the basis for the sermon.”⁸ The main idea then became the basis for an outline, which usually included a series of associated points that were often developed by the addition of appropriate illustrations for the purposes of rational explanation. Rhetoric was often utilized here to deliver the sermon and bolster the art of rational persuasion. The sermon was a rational exercise that aimed to get the biblical idea across through explanation, illustration, and application. In short, it is what homileticsians would now consider a form of expository preaching.

Understood this way, one can more readily track the long history and use of this homiletical art form. As one writer put it, “[f]rom the time of Augustine, preachers turned to the Bible for the content of preaching and to Aristotle for the *form* and style of the sermon.”⁹ This style and form were, of course, aimed at elegant oration and not mere empty entertainment. So using Aristotle as license to engage in free-wielding modern day egalitarian forms and styles of speech would be contrary and insulting to the ancient rhetorical art form.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Current forms of expository preaching claim they retain the same basic thrust. In fact, present-day advocates hold that expository preaching is one of the best ways to speak God's word precisely because it “is empowered preaching that rightfully

4. Jay Heinrichs, *Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About the Art of Persuasion*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2013), 4.

5. Ibid.

6. The emotions and imagination under consideration are understood to be First Article gifts, located in the conscience of every hearer. There is no Enthusiast intention with these elements, as they will always remain subordinate to and in service of the biblical text and the law and gospel hermeneutic.

7. James W. Thompson, *Preaching like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 2.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of a biblical text.”¹⁰ However, the use of rhetoric, particularly the use of pathos and vividness in the classical sense, is little utilized, if at all, by expository preachers today. Ironically, though the expressed desire is to emphasize the biblical text, the current trend among many preachers (as noted in the introduction) is to have their sermon delivery shaped by cultural relevancy rather than rhetoric, eloquent oration, or a simple exposition of a text.

The name for this culturally relevant movement is “contextualization.” Though it is not limited to homiletics, it does take a starring role there. A full treatment of this homiletical and hermeneutical trend awaits further exploration; however I will offer these few brief essential observations. Contextualization is the well-meaning but misguided effort to have preachers let the context they are trying to “win for Christ” control the word they speak of Christ. In effect, the cart is placed in front of the horse: the focus is more on the context than on the text itself. As a result, “contextual” forms and styles end up dictating the content of the sermon, which then makes the biblical text inferior to the context of the culture. It is a dangerous and dubious endeavor, where clear warnings are already beginning to emerge,¹¹ but one that nonetheless helps exemplify the rationale behind the move away from the Old Homiletic to what has become known as the New Homiletic.

THE NEW HOMILETIC

As the sermon has been a constant feature in the worship of Christianity for two millennia, changes to preaching styles and content can be readily tracked. Thus, at various moments in the church’s life, historians have noted how preaching has changed in response to shifting cultural situations or to preaching methods in need of correction. As such, new sermon strategies have replaced older forms. In some cases it has revitalized the preaching ministry of the church. In others, it has led God’s children out to wander in the wilderness for a season.

Accordingly, there came a time in the more recent history of the church when the Old Homiletic of traditional expository

preaching had become too academic for some and was deemed ineffective for the listeners of “a Christian culture who had grown bored with the predictability of older sermon forms and with the familiarity of the biblical story.”¹² Putting it simply, it was not speaking their language. Thus, advocates of what became called the New Homiletic offered a solution to revitalize what was considered the boring and predictable preaching of the day.

The current trend among many preachers is to have their sermon delivery shaped by cultural relevancy.

In short, where the Old Homiletic tried to get an idea across to the congregation through rational persuasion, the New Homiletic had the desire “to lead the congregation to ‘experience’ the dynamic of the text—including its aesthetic and affective dimensions.”¹³ This approach required preachers to consider how their listeners were experiencing the sermon. It invited them to participate in the preacher’s journey, but draw their own conclusions based on their own experience of the text. Thus, where the Old Homiletic was deductive, this new approach was inductive, and subsequently narratively focused, with an emphasis on the emotional and visceral. Its aim was to be more description than exhortation; and rather than reduce things to ideas, the sermon was to “do what the text does,” not by deduction, but by narrative—by storytelling with the biblical genres.

It was a method deemed necessary to rescue hearers from the perceived inadequacies of the Old Homiletic. For a time, some felt it did. However, as one could well guess, the New Homiletic has also been deemed incomplete. Yet again, something new or old (or both) was needed to lead preachers forward. And when the critiques were in, still more alternatives were identified.¹⁴ But will they last or simply be passing fads? As James Thompson says: “The time has come, I believe, to incorporate the gains of the past generation, recognize the weakness of the new approaches, and develop a homiletic that will sustain churches in the future.”¹⁵ It is to that task I now turn.

10. David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 13.

11. David Helm offers a clear word of caution: “One of the problems with contextualized preaching today, however, is that it often has a misplaced emphasis. By elevating contextualization to a studied discipline overly focused on practical gains, some preachers treat the biblical text in a haphazard and halfhearted way. This is the *blind adherence* problem. . . . Blind adherence to contextualization alters our preaching in at least three ways, and none of them is for the better. First, it impairs our perspective in the study—in his preparation of his sermon, the preacher becomes preoccupied with the world rather than God’s Word. This leads to *impressionistic preaching*. Second, it changes the use of the pulpit—the Word now supports our intoxicating plans and purposes, rather than those of God. This is *inebriated preaching*. Finally, it shifts our understanding of authority—the preacher’s ‘fresh’ and ‘spirit led’ devotional reading becomes the determinative point of truth. I call this ‘*inspired preaching*’ (ibid., 16, 17).

12. Thompson, *Preaching like Paul*, 1.

13. Ibid., 3.

14. Various methods, including versions of the Old and New Homiletic are (1) Text driven, (2) Propositional, (3) Narrative, (4) Phenomenological move, (5) Image driven, and recently, (6) Contextualization. Within each structure or method there are multiple corresponding and often subtle variations.

15. Thompson, *Preaching like Paul*, 9.

THE ART OF RHETORIC: ENGAGING DISTRACTED HEARERS

Without question our digital age is creating profound and deep changes in the people of our time. Smaller attention spans are just the beginning. Dozens of studies by neurobiologists, psychologists, educators, and Web designers have demonstrated that people's brains have been digitally conditioned to lose focus. Also known as the *information age* (the digitization and computerization of massive amounts of information), our culture is uniquely and markedly habituating the behaviors and minds of both believers and unbelievers toward digital dependency for their thinking, feeling, and experiencing.

As the projector displays the digital word up on the screen, a distraction away from the oral word occurs.

This digital invasion has created a new divide among members of the world, making the generational differences even more noticeable. People are now divided into two groups, those born before digital technology and those born after. They are respectively called “digital immigrants” and “digital natives.”¹⁶

However, rather than succumb to the temptation to divide our church services to reflect these artificial cultural divisions, or preach our sermons in ways that employ the very things that corrupt attention spans, there is the art of rhetoric. When combined with the power of God's word, not only can it speak through distraction, but bring order out of chaos, and meaning to people who are quite literally digitally amusing themselves to death. It works in both expositional and narrative forms. Whether using the Old Homiletic or the New, intentionally and responsibly orating the emotion (pathos) and the vividness (imagination) of a biblical text has a captivating power all its own. In it there is the capacity to move a hearer from what feels like a black-and-white experience of the text, to experiencing it in living color.

ORAL WORD VERSUS THE DEPICTED WORD

Here a brief but profound difference needs to be noted. Digital technology has brought about the use of screens to accompany the divine service. A judicious use of them can be attempted in support of the liturgy and readings (as is the inherited practice of my congregation), but the danger of distraction always lingers. What is more, when screens are used to aid the preacher

in the delivery of the sermon it should be noted that there is a difference between the “oral word” and the “depicted word.”

The oral word would refer to the preached word. This, of course, comes from the preacher. Though there is nothing special in and of himself, within his office — the preaching office — and through his voice in service to that office, there is the presence of Christ and his gifts of grace.¹⁷ Thus, the voice of the preacher speaks the power of God for the salvation of souls (Rom 1:16). This is profoundly different than the depicted word. As the projector displays the digital word up on the screen, though it certainly is still the word, a distraction away from the oral word occurs. Not that the distraction of the screen cannot be overcome, or maybe even at times be used in ways that are salutary, it is just that the distractions of our digital age can come in multiple forms — by the simple visual font of the words, the hue and lighting of the screen, or the pictures on the screen. Given the challenge of our digital age, perhaps sticking with the oral word might provide a greater consistency and continuity for our people floating in a sea of digital distractions.

THE END OF ABSENCE

In fact, bestselling author Nicholas Carr tells us exactly what we are up against. In his recent must-read book, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, he notes that “when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning.”¹⁸ In other words, in a matter of minutes people click here, tap there, scroll down, swipe left, toggle back and forth, open another page, and Google another topic. They are constantly splitting their attention, trying to multitask (which, in medical fact, is an impossibility for the brain), all while endlessly moving and clicking on the next instant digital stimulation. Carr minces no words about what is happening: “With the exception of alphabets and number systems, the Net may well be the single most powerful mind-altering technology that has ever come into general use.”¹⁹ Pastors and preachers need to sit up and listen. Crafting sermons in the face of this challenge can be an arduous task. But with the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the encouragement of some ancient tools at our disposal, writing a sermon can be transformed from drudgery to joy, from agony to art.

However, preachers looking to paint works of art need to see the whole canvas on which they're painting. To that end, Michael Harris offers another telling commentary on our digital age in his extremely provocative book, *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We've Lost in a World of Constant Connection*.

17. AC v, 1, “Of the Ministry” (Triglotta; italics original): “That we may obtain this faith, the *Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.*” The German is most helpful: “Solchen Glauben zu erlangen, hat Gott das *Predigtamt eingesetzt*, Evangelium und Sakramente gegeben” (To obtain such faith God instituted the *office of preaching*, giving the gospel and the sacraments).

18. Carr, *The Shallows*, 116.

19. Ibid.

16. Archibald D. Hart and Sylvia Hart Frejd, *The Digital Invasion: How Technology is Shaping You and Your Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 27.

He offers an eloquent lament for the loss of solitude and quiet in our age of constant aural and visual stimulation:

I fear we are the last of the daydreamers. I fear our children will lose lack, lose absence, and never comprehend its quiet, immeasurable value. If the next generation socializes more online than in the so-called real world, and if they have no memory of a time when the reverse was true, it follows that my peers and I are the last to feel the static surrounding online socialization. The Internet becomes “the real world” and our physical reality becomes the thing that needs to be defined and set aside — “my analog life,” “my snail life,” “my empty life.”²⁰

Fear not dear reader. The devil has always threatened us with loss. However, loss does not frighten God, nor need it frighten us, for God’s word creates out of nothing. No loss can make his word suffer or threaten to undo what it has done. Rather, his mighty word takes empty lives and fills them with vitality and grace. The devil has always aimed to distract us and draw us into the dark world of our sinful hearts. But the gospel calls us into community, frees burdened consciences, cleanses hearts, and offers something far grander to live for than mere distraction. Jesus Christ became incarnate, dwelled among us, brought hope where there was darkness, and on the cross of Calvary bore in his body and on his body all the sorrow, suffering, and misery of sin in the world, and then took it all away and buried it with him in the tomb.

The devil taunted and said, “All is lost.” He thought he had won. But then the tomb was opened and the resurrection light of Christ was unleashed on the world, and it has never stopped shining since. This is not a truth to speak blandly. This is not a story to be buried in abstractions, viewed in black and white, or subjected to the cultural fancies of the day. It is a story crying out to be proclaimed in all of its fullness. Every depth is to be plumbed, every emotion unearthed, and every truth seen in living color. The art of rhetoric will do just that.

HIGH-DEFINITION PREACHING

In a world of seven-minute attention spans a preacher may be tempted to sell out for a digital quick fix. However, audience interest has never been a preacher’s main purpose. Yes, it is part of the deal, but preaching the word in its truth and purity is the highest priority. Of course, this does not give a preacher license to be lazy, boring, or even mediocre when it comes to preaching. In fact, a preacher ought to have studied enough and practiced enough so that he can make a pile of dirt sound interesting. Like the ancients of old, our task is to make people like it when pastors preach. (That is, of course, different than liking him as a person.)

Preachers preach so that hearers will hear. The desire, of course, is for faithfulness, but faithfulness coupled with pas-

sion and infused with fascination so that what is proclaimed will be aired in living color. And when appropriate vocal inflection and cadence are also utilized, it will be a work of art seen in high definition.

PATHOS AND VIVIDNESS IN THE CARE OF LAW AND GOSPEL

To help make that happen I will now come to the crux of this essay. Compelling preaching in our time hinges on the use of two ancient rhetorical tools, pathos (emotion) and vividness (imagination). By highlighting these two elements in the care of the law–gospel hermeneutic, a sermon can be brought into living color, even for distracted listeners.

Pathos

First is pathos. God created us as emotional human beings. We’ve been given emotions so that we can emote. However, when appealing to emotions in preaching, a careful balance must be maintained to uphold fidelity to the biblical text rather than crossing over into manipulation of the hearers. In classic rhetoric, pathos would be employed to win the argument. However, since Jesus Christ is the risen Lord and Savior, the argument has been settled. Thus, the preacher’s job is not so much to persuade or manipulate anyone, but to proclaim and deliver Jesus to his hearers.

Lutheran preachers are not necessarily there to rationally persuade people about Jesus, but to actually give them Jesus.

In other words, contrary to some of our Christian cousins, Lutheran preachers are not necessarily there to rationally persuade people about Jesus, but to actually give them Jesus, and to do so without unethically manipulating people with emotions that are foreign to the text, but to responsibly draw out the emotions present in a biblical text, show them in light of the law and gospel, and apply them to the hearers as whole persons. For the hearers are far more than rational beings. They are delicate souls, full of passions, hopes, and dreams, as well as spiritual creatures that are afflicted by the evil one and contaminated by sin. As such, the preached word pierces more than just the cognitive level, but penetrates the conscience, tugs at the heart, challenges the mind, and soothes the soul.

The art of the preacher, then, is to viscerally engage the hearers with the pathos of the text for the purpose of more clearly applying the law or the gospel in the most faithful but intimate of ways. I call the communication of this truth “evocative transference.” It flows out of the rhetorical use of pathos, but is homi-

20. Michael Harris, *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We’ve Lost in a World of Constant Connection* (New York: Current, 2014), 48.

letically refined as the preacher taps into the emotional state of the soul by way of the emotion present in the text of Scripture. In other words, it unsheathes another dimension of Scripture that allows for it to be received beyond the mere cognitive level, and penetrate other sensory levels.²¹

The ultimate power of preaching lies not in the persuasive rhetoric of the preacher, but in the word of God.

The experience of the hearers will be somewhat inductive, as what is portrayed will strike them in the midst of their own personal circumstances. However, these tools of inductive rhetoric are still subordinate to the deductive truths of law and gospel. Thus, no ambiguity or uncertainty about the use of these rhetorical tools is intended. But rather they are meant to serve the law and the gospel as appropriate to the text. In evocative transference, then, the preacher does not manipulate the emotions of the hearer, but merely faithfully transfers (evokes, calls forth) to the hearer the emotions already inherent in the text.

Vividness

Second is vividness.²² The imagination is a powerful part of our created bodies. It is the capacity to mentally see an image in your head, and when compelling enough oration is used, you can not only see it, but you can also hear, taste, smell, and feel the image being evoked. Vividness is not simply good storytelling. Though both pathos and vividness fit well with a narrative homiletic, they are not necessarily mutually inclusive.

Nonetheless, when employing vividness, a preacher needs to consider the content of a text over against the imagery of a text. The idea is to engage the imagination with the text, while also recognizing that the text drives the context, and not the other way around. The Old Homiletic might simply keep to an abstract idea and propositional statements about the text, while the narrative homiletic will aim to experience the idea by

means of story—sometimes, even stories unrelated to the text. Regardless, utilizing the imagination actually invites the hearer not only to “experience” the idea but to “see” the idea in pictures. Not just in plain black and white, but in living color. And when one juxtaposes the emotional consideration of a text with the imagination, the sermon will undoubtedly be proclaimed in high definition.

Perhaps an example is the best way to demonstrate. There are numerous abstract concepts and propositional statements in Paul’s writings. Even so, the language he uses is very often surrounded with language that can easily evoke imagery. Consider Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Chapter two is the great “You have been saved by grace through faith” declaration of Paul (Eph 2:8–9). However, surrounding this abstract concept is language rich with imagery and ripe with emotion. Consider verse one: “You were once dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” Death is a powerful image. Countless images and emotions go with death—positive, negative, heartbreaking, destructive. But it is not simply the dead Paul is talking about, it is “the walking dead.” What does a dead man walking look like? What does that image evoke? Is it a zombie, a death row inmate, or a body filled with terminal cancer? What does it look like? The point is not simply to consider cognitively the abstract idea of what sin does, but to vividly portray a picture of what it does.

The church (the body of believers) and faith are not abstractions but very real entities. As with pathos, utilizing vividness connects the believer to this here-and-now truth in more ways than the merely cognitive level, but taps into the emotional and spiritual level.

To help flesh out this imagery for a sermon, consider what might be called “interrogating the text.” Numerous questions can be asked of the text. Are there comparisons in the text? If so, with whom and/or what? What kind of imagery is present, that is, which of the senses does it engage? Is it of the past, present, or future? What’s in the background? What’s in the foreground? What gets brought into sharp focus? Who are the key actors? You, me, Jews, Gentiles, members of the church, the devil, the triune God, the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Is there a sequence of imagery present? If so, how does it progress? Are there different emotions that correspond with the changing imagery? By asking these questions of the text the preacher can craft bigger and brighter textual imagery in his preaching.

Let the reader note: nowhere does this undermine, negate, or prohibit the presence of or the proclamation of the profound and necessary propositional statements of law and gospel. The point of this method is simply to let the hearers viscerally see, feel, and hear this abstract concept in light of the law and gospel. My whole proposal is rooted and grounded in the conviction that the ultimate power of preaching lies not in the persuasive rhetoric of the preacher, but in the word of God, the Spirit’s sword, which remains always living and active (Heb 4:12).

Using vividness in a sermon demonstrates that the experience of the hearers will be inductive, since what is vividly portrayed will strike them in the midst of their own person-

21. Luther has much to say on the study of affect, and offers a great deal to support the concept of evocative transference. One simple example is his teaching on the Psalter: “Hence it is that the Psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better” (*LW* 35:256–57). I am indebted to Dr. John Kleinig for graciously providing me a significant reading list of Luther’s teaching on affect.

22. Here, too, credit goes to Dr. John Kleinig for first putting me onto this thought and giving me permission to develop it from his lecture delivered at the Doxology Grand Reunion, 2 August 2014.

al circumstances. However, as was noted above, these tools of rhetoric are meant to remain subordinate to the deductive truths of law and gospel and will not leave the hearers to figure out the meaning of the sermon on their own.

**TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY
LUTHERAN HOMILETIC**

In essence, a hybrid narrative rhetorical homiletic is being espoused. Where the inductive rhetorical elements of pathos and vividness may strike the hearers differently, they both still serve the deductive elements of law and gospel, which in homiletical form do have a repetitive narrative quality about them. That is, as the biblical text leads the way for the sermon, the distinction between law and gospel will ultimately shape the outcome of the sermon as it routinely and narratively leads to the cross of Christ and the empty tomb. The narrative, in this way,

handcuffs intrigue to the ancient text. So, the homily gains relational force when the sermon is passionate enough to be visceral and story-driven enough to be visual.²³

23. Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 12.

In other words, the aim with all of this is to make the hearers want to come back for more, even if they recognize a familiar pattern about the sermon. My contention is that hearers will be more prone to do this when the sermon is preached in living color and high definition.

It is here that I believe a contemporary Lutheran homiletic takes shape. Because the sermon and its rhetorical tools are brought under the curative direction of law and gospel, the text will always direct the preacher in his preaching. Yet, that very curative direction also calls for exploration, explanation, and exhortation to take place in the most vivid and visceral of language, as the preacher takes his hearers on a weekly narrative journey to Christ’s cross and empty tomb.

In a digital world of seven-minute attention spans, the art of narrative rhetoric pulls distracted hearers out of their mental clicking, swiping, and searching and viscerally grips them with the vividness of the biblical text. While a constantly connected digital world degrades our solitude and demoralizes our identity, the visceral word of Christ brings peace and security. While digital and virtual realities wear away at what is real and invigorating, the evocatively preached word of law and gospel invites listeners to see, hear, and feel the divine stimulation, exhilaration, and salvation that comes through the power of God’s word preached in living color. **LOGIA**

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ISSUE	THEME	DEADLINE
Eastertide 2016	Holy Matrimony	September 1, 2015
Holy Trinity 2016	Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness	December 1, 2015
Reformation 2016	Simul justus et peccator	March 1, 2016
Epiphany 2016	Lutheran Triumphalism	June 1, 2016

Send all submissions to the appropriate editors and addresses as listed in the front. Electronic submissions are preferred. Long discursive footnotes are discouraged and are subject to editorial revision or removal. Submit articles to Aaron Moldenhauer • PO Box 369 • Beecher, IL, 60401 • senioreditor@logia.org • All submissions must be accompanied by an abstract of the article, 300 words or less. Please write for our style sheet or go to **LOGIA**’s web site <http://www.logia.org/> and click the “Call for Manuscripts” link.
