

#770 The Preacher's Audience

Colleagues,

Dare one take it for granted that everyone who reads this will be in church more than once over Holy Week? That's less than two weeks in the offing, by the way. I say that for the sake of those of you who aren't the designated preacher for this or that assembly of the saints. We who are have already started to sweat bullets.

Indeed, the pressure is on. That the week's sermons are several is the least of it. They'll be preached from long, dense texts about the essence of the Christian faith to the biggest and most varied crowds of the year, especially on Easter Sunday. God save us for the crowd's sake from making too big a hash of it.

With this in mind we choose this week to send along some reflections by Robert Schultz on a piece I wrote in November about the imperative of approaching scriptural texts with the contemporary hearer in mind. Bob has more to say about that against the specific backdrop of the six-step methodology that shapes text studies at Crossings.org. I trust you'll notice Bob's invitation to receive his thoughts as a spur for further discussion, a point he underscored in an accompanying note to the editors: "These theses are formulated for discussion purposes, not as truth." I hope you'll be spurred by that to push the discussion along. Send comments as ever to cabraun98ATaolDOTcom.

If I read Bob rightly myself, he's asking preachers to remember and honor their pastoral vocation when they step into pulpits. Palm Sunday will pounce mere days from now. Let's get busy thinking about this, whether as preachers praying to make less hash than usual this time around, or as listeners praying for

acute and faithful ears when the days of much hearing begin.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce, for the editorial team.

Note: the following theses are a direct response to earlier Thursday Theology postings. The author strongly urges readers to refresh their memories of that material before proceeding. See the links in the first paragraph.

1. In reflecting on the comments made by [Burce on November 24](#) and by [Schroeder on November 8](#), I have formulated some theses for discussion of the role of pastoral diagnosis in sermon preparation.
2. The Crossings method is a useful method for the study of a text.
3. The Crossings method may not be as useful in the preparation of a sermon.
4. The distinction between the study of a text and the preparation of a sermon is an important distinction.
5. The Crossings method focuses on identifying the person in the text who has the problem.
6. The sermon is focused on the need of those who will hear the sermon.
7. Those present in the congregation have come to worship God. The sermon is a helpful element of worship but is not essential in such a way that worship cannot occur if there is no sermon.
8. The preacher focuses on the need(s) of those who will hear the sermon rather than on the need of one individual—which requires pastoral care.
9. In determining the need which the sermon will address, the preacher seeks to identify a common need of the people who will gather for worship—as part of their worship they will

hear and reflect on the sermon.

10. The worship of some members may be more enriched by other elements of the service, for example, by meeting their need to worship in a group, by the administration of the sacraments, or by reinforcing their identity as members of this group of worshippers.
11. For diagnostic purposes, the common need of members of a group gathered for worship can be compared to an epidemic in which there is a common problem even though the symptoms of each individual may differ.
12. Diagnostic skill is measured by the accurate identification of the epidemic as the cause of the symptoms.
13. Therapeutic skill is measured by the treatment of the underlying illness of the epidemic.
14. Conversion of symptoms of one kind into symptoms of another kind may be helpful but is management rather than therapy. For example, converting unbelief, shame, or guilt into some other spiritual problem may be helpful but does not resolve the underlying problem.
15. In the organization of the congregations that we individually serve as pastors, the pastor begins his preparation for the sermon with the task of identifying these symptoms in the people who will hear the sermon and diagnosing them as having a common source.
16. This common source of these symptoms, that is, the epidemic, is described as law in the Lutheran Confessions.
17. The symptoms of the experience of the law presented by members of the congregation are manifold.
18. The New Testament uses a rich variety of images in describing these varied symptoms of people's actual experience of the work of the law.
19. The Book of Concord similarly refers to a variety of images and their accompanying symptoms without ranking

them.

20. The symptoms of the work of the law that are described in the text and/or that may predominate in the preacher's personal experience may or may not coincide with the symptoms experienced by the persons described in the text or by the preacher.
21. The problem to be addressed in the sermon is the problem experienced by a significant number (not necessarily all) of the people who will hear the sermon.

Robert C. Schultz
Seattle, Washington