

SERMON: "ABOUT WORSHIP ... WE HEAR GOD'S WORD"
TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 85
NEW TESTAMENT 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

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Trinity Sunday

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

Last week I began the sermon with a question about my preaching.
I asked, "Is it any good?" Y'all responded with a slight chuckle.
So might I ask again ... we are, in this series of sermons that seeks
to explain our order of worship, now on that part of the service
the part when we hear God's word, read and proclaimed.

About the sermon, "is it any good?" In last week's sermon on confession
and forgiveness, I gave you a yardstick by which to evaluate a sermon
Is it just a bunch of religion or morality pills? Or does it point to God's mercy?
This week I want to recognize the practical reality that there are many of
different yardsticks you use to rate how good or not so good a sermon is

What are some of the ones you might use?
Was it practical, give you something you might apply in your own life?
Was it provocative, give you something to think about?
Did the preacher make you laugh?
Did you stay awake through it?

Those are but a few of the many yardsticks used
One I've heard plenty of times is this, a quote originally used to describe
the work of the journalist, "The task of the preacher is to comfort the afflicted
and to afflict the comfortable."

Come to think of it, that is one I've heard from other preachers.
I'd really like to hear what the rest of you think about that yardstick.
I'd also like to know what other yardsticks you might use.

The "how" of preaching is a question well worth considering
I really would like to hear about how you determine if a sermon is any good
We can talk about the "how" a bit more later ... but let's also consider other
important (I'd say more important) questions like "what?" and "why?"

The 'what' of our preaching is what matters most – the 'what' is God's word
We come into God's house to worship together and to hear God's word
We want to and need to hear what God has to say to us
The words of the psalmist, written as a prayer, speak for us

THE “WHAT”

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for God will speak peace to his people, to God’s faithful, to those who turn to the Lord in their hearts. Surely God’s salvation is at hand for those who fear the Lord, that God’s glory may dwell in our land.

The preacher might tell a story or paint a picture or quote someone
But what we are trying to do in every instance is to point to what God is saying through the word written and heard. **“Let us hear what God will speak.”**

Our worship service is ordered around that, everything is meant to tie to the scripture lessons for that day – the hymns and special music, the liturgy we use (things printed, things said), the children’s sermon
I pray you have noticed where the children’s sermon is in our worship
It follows the reading of scripture. It is based on those readings

Kids don’t leave for worship explorers until after they have heard God’s word
And we don’t hear God’s word until after we have prayed for illumination after we have asked God’s Spirit to open our ears, our minds, our hearts.
I like leaving the Holy Spirit banner up for months after Pentecost
A reminder that the Spirit continues to illuminate and empower us

The order of things is quite intentional – prayer for illumination, scripture readings, children’s time, anthem or special music (a sermon in song), then the sermon. In all these, **“Let us hear what God will speak”**

Going back then to whether or not my preaching is any good
I’d like to give you another yardstick with which to measure a sermon
This one I have printed and will leave in the pulpit for the preachers who follow me and Johnny in this pulpit. It is from the constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA, our Book of Confessions

Every year when we elect and then train new elders and deacons we work through those confessions of faith, we ask the new officers to name their favorite confession. This one is mine, written to confront the Christian nationalism of another land in another time – Germany. 1934

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party were elected by the people.
They quickly consolidated their power in government and in the press and in the pulpit with what was called the “German Christian” movement
The Barmen Declaration is a response of faithful church leaders to that effort to use theology to prop up and empower the state

Show image - The Theological Declaration of Barmen

TRUE TO THE WORD

If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and that we in faith experience what he himself has said: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

That is how I measure what makes for a good sermon
Is it true to the word, to the scripture lesson on which it is based?

That is a tall order. Preaching is kind of frightening, trying to be a channel through which God might speak. It is something best done with humility and at the same time, with confidence ... that God will speak through you.

We have this strange custom in the church where the preacher stands at the back and people shake hands and have a quick word, quite often a word about the sermon. It is usually something positive but not specific "Nice message" or "I liked your sermon." Nice to say and nice to hear

But what preachers really like is something a bit more specific.
That is helpful, including when the feedback is not so positive
I appreciate how specific you have been when something I said hit a nerve, when I afflicted the comfortable a bit too much

I want to and need to hear from you when that happens
I also like hearing when something I say comforts you or challenges you
My favorite bit of feedback though is one I have heard often
It is when the feedback is specific to what you heard like,
"I appreciate what you said about hope. I needed to hear that."

And that gets me thinking, questioning ... "I don't remember saying anything about hope." I even go back and look at my notes. I didn't
But somehow that is what you heard and needed to hear
That is God at work through the preaching and hearing of God's word

That's the heart of our service, hearing God's word
That is the 'what?' – God's word. The passage from 2 Timothy speaks to that, about God's word being our truth, the truth – sacred writings. This passage speaks to the what ... and to the why. Paul writes to Timothy

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

SUMMARY

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Inspired and useful for. God's word is inspired so as to be put to use
Do we take what we hear and put it to good use? Another yardstick.

These verses describe the usefulness of scripture in several ways
Useful for teaching, teaching God's will, God's way – instructions for living
Useful for reproof. Yes, that is what it says. Reproof is a critique
“No. not that way!” Example - When cutting the veggies ...
Don't stick your fingers out, tuck them in. Reproof

The same logic continues in these verses
Useful for correction, “I told you already, tuck those fingers in”
Useful for training in righteousness – righteousness, not self-righteousness
And to wrap it all up, how useful God's word is, Paul ends with ...
“so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

God's word isn't just a coffee table book, nice pictures
It is given to us so that we might hear what God will speak
It is given to so as to be useful, we might learn a thing or two
And not just for the sake of trivia ... but that we might hear it
and live it, equipped for every good work

I like how these verses from 2 Timothy end with us being equipped
because we took the time to read and hear God's word together
It is useful. We might hear just what we needed to hear
whether it be a word of reproof ... or a word about hope

God's word read and preached and heard is useful like that
It calls forth from us some kind of response, we will talk more
about what that response might look like next week

But this now being football season, I will end with this
You might think of it this way - This hearing God's word thing we do
on Sunday mornings before kickoff ... It is a bit like the coach's talk
before the players take the field, something to fire us up
to go out there and give it our best. “Let's go!”