

MODULE 6

SACRAMENTAL PREACHING

ACTIVITY GUIDE



PREACH THE
WORD
It's *Still* All About
Jesus

Introduction:

This module is designed to help the pastor connect the Sacraments to the everyday lives of the people he serves in a creative way that is faithful to the text and to the analogy of faith. The goal is that the hearer find comfort in the objective means whereby God justifies the sinner. At the same time, we want to avoid simply inserting the Sacraments into a sermon apart from exegesis of the text. While we want to be accurate, we should not be limited to time-tested formulas and language such as “Word and Sacrament” and quotes from the Small Catechism. This module seeks to help the preacher expand his understanding of the Sacraments, his vocabulary about the Sacraments, and develop his skills in both seeing more clearly how God works through means and conveying that to his hearers by faithful engagement with the biblical text.

Phase 1:

TRIAD MEETING – OPENING REFLECTIONS ON SACRAMENTAL PREACHING

In the first meeting of the triad, you will watch the module’s five video segments and work through the written module materials as you converse with one another about how to preach sacramentally.

1.1 CONFESSION AND CHRISTOCENTRICITY:

A. General description: All topics related to preaching can be considered in terms of the heart and the art of preaching.

At the heart of Lutheran preaching lies the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The first video segment considers how the Sacraments are related to our Lutheran confession of what preaching is meant to convey and the preacher’s proclamation of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

In addition to the heart of preaching, there is also the art. The art of preaching attends to those things that, while not necessary, are helpful for preachers and for the people who hear God’s Word. These are things that vary from preacher to preacher but which, nonetheless, we do well to consider. The second and third video segments will consider how we might speak of the Sacraments in fresh and engaging ways that are faithful to the text. Finally, in this first meeting, you will watch a video of a sermon that exemplifies sacramental preaching.

B. Module materials: This section of the module offers video segments and discussion prompts that consider sacramental preaching by looking at theology, theory, and a sample sermon.

Theology: Video segment (Introduction) and group discussion

Watch video segment (Introduction) and then discuss the following questions.

Discussion:

- 1) What is the definition of the word “Sacrament?”
- 2) What is the difference between saying that the Lutheran church is a sacramental church or saying that it is a church with Sacraments?
- 3) Which ought we be and why?

Theology: Video segment 1 and group discussion

Watch video segment 1 and then discuss the following questions.

Discussion:

Do the people in your congregation view the Sacraments as miracles? If not, how might we help them with ceremonies, catechesis, and preaching to better understand this?

- 1) Read together the healing of the paralytic recorded in Mark 2. How would the acceptable, varying definitions of the word “Sacrament” and place of Absolution (either as a third Sacrament or an extension of Baptism) impact the preaching of this miracle so that it applies to the hearers?
- 2) In preparation for the next segment, answer and discuss the following question: How else does the Word come to us beyond Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, and the Absolution?

Theology: Video segment 2 and group discussion

Watch video segment 2 and then discuss the following questions.

Discussion:

- 1) Using the campfire idea with the Means of Grace, what things besides the Sacraments are definitely “at the fire,” that is, what has God instituted that bestows grace?
- 2) How might you preach at a wedding about marriage as something near to a Means of Grace and connect marriage to the Sacraments?
- 3) How might you preach on the eating of the Passover Lamb as related to the Holy Communion?

Theology: Video segment 3 and group discussion

Watch video segment 3 and then discuss the following:

Discussion:

Take a few minutes to name some motifs and how they run through the Bible. For example, someone might say: “There is a motif of clothing in the Bible. God clothed Adam and Eve in the garden. Jacob gave a coat of many colors to Joseph. And the father covered the prodigal son when he returned. These stories all show how God covers our sin and shame and relate to Baptism.” Another person might say, “Yes, and think how that relates to how Jesus was naked on the cross. He was uncovered

to cover us.” And so forth. Try to come up with at least one motif per person. Encourage everyone to participate and contribute.

Sample sermon: Video segment 4 and group discussion

Watch video segment 4 and then discuss the following questions.

In this segment you will get a glimpse of sacramental preaching in practice. You will view a sermon titled, “Precious and Very Great Promises,” preached by the Rev. Wade M. Seaver, pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, Bellaire, Mich. The text for the sermon is 2 Peter 1:2–11. Note that the sermon was preached on Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2018, at Hope. Use the questions provided below to guide your follow-up discussion.

I have provided the sermon because I believe it encapsulates the theology of the Means of Grace well. The questions below can be answered in a negative way without questioning the integrity of Pastor Seaver or denigrating his sermon. We don’t expect any sermon preached by mortals to be perfect in every way. The point of the exercise is to grow and to learn, not to criticize one another but to evaluate and critique our own preaching.

Discussion:

- 1) Second Peter 2:1–11 is not an obviously sacramental passage. What drives Pastor Seaver’s vision of the Sacraments in the text? Is this a faithful reading?
- 2) How does the sermon fit within the context of Lent?
- 3) Would the sermon, as preached, apply and be understandable to your people? If not, was the problem the content or the style? Could the content be presented in a way that would make it applicable?
- 4) What could the preacher have done to engage the text more fully?
- 5) What could the preacher have done to engage the lives of his people more fully?
- 6) Did the sermon direct people to the objective Means of Grace for comfort and strength in a way that was pointed and also engaging, or did it state things in a clichéd or tired way?

1.2 COMPETENCY:

A. General description: Having looked at sacramental preaching both theologically and practically, this section provides resources and exercises to develop and evaluate your competency as a textual preacher.

B. Module materials: Provided here are resources to help you evaluate and sharpen your intentional engagement of the biblical text for the sake of sacramental preaching.

Evaluation: Checklist for sacramental preaching

The following checklist can help preachers in their sermon prep to fully engage the biblical text with an eye towards the Sacraments.

My exegesis focuses on God’s actions.

I see in the text how God is active in creation and consider how this relates to the Sacraments.

I am actively looking at the text for motifs and key words to bring light to both the immediate text and also to the life of faith.

I consider how my hearers might overly spiritualize a text or abstract it. I seek to make it clear, by means of the text, that God works through means.

My goal in preaching is to comfort sinners by directing them to God's objective means of grace.

I consider how the text might shed light on special events that will occur during the Service where the sermon is to be preached, such as the installation of officers, dedication of paraments, and so forth.

I consider seasonal emphases in the Church Year such as the Incarnation or the manifestation of Christ's Divine Nature and how that relates to the Sacraments and might relate to or be used as an illustration or application of the text.

Exercises for skill acquisition: Brainstorm these familiar texts below in a new way. Read the following descriptions. Then read the text and develop the ideas here more fully or come up with new ideas based on the text. Consider in your discussion how you might outline or develop a sermon that includes these ideas.

- 1) The lost son in Luke 15:11–32. The parable is built around hunger. The lost son hungers for the wrong things and ends up starving in a foreign country. It ends with feasting in the family. Both of those things might inform our view of the Sacrament of the Altar and fellowship. The son that returns is covered with the Father's robe. That might tell us something of Baptism. Finally, if we understand that Christ is the fatted calf, sacrificed for the sons, and given for their joy we might see more deeply into the Sacrament of the Altar.
- 2) Gabriel's prophecy to Zechariah about John in Luke 1:13–17. John is forbidden from drinking wine even as the Israelites had been forbidden from drinking blood. He is the embodiment of fasting. This shows the harshness of his ministry in contrast with Jesus who turned water into wine. While he is filled with the Holy Spirit, he does not baptize with the Holy Spirit. All these things work together to show us the greatness of the Messiah who gives Himself in wine. Our fasting, the ministry of John, is over, and the ceremonial law is over, for Jesus lives. Thus He gives us wine and blood as a feast and His life is in it.
- 3) The drunkenness of Noah in Genesis 9:20–23. Noah abused God's gifts. He did not use them according to their institution. He became not only drunk but also naked. Misuse of wine in the Lord's Supper also has dire consequences and can strip away the garment of righteousness. Shem and Japheth had mercy on Noah. Walking backwards to spare him shame they covered him with a garment. The Lord covers us in Holy Baptism where we put on Christ.

Exercising imagination for the sake of faithfulness: Read together the following quote from Paul Scott Wilson's book *Broken Words* and then discuss using the questions below.

Typically preachers add something to the biblical text. To retell a biblical text effectively one does not simply repeat it. One puts the text ... into one's own words and adds emphasis and emotion. One retells it in a life-like setting, usually as an episode in some faith journey. One adds certain pieces of information to it to make it come alive in the present day, and this can leave a preacher open to the charge of distorting or

otherwise misrepresenting the text. Every time we preach a biblical text ... we add something to the text that is not in it, be it history, geography, archaeology, translation, tradition, explicit discussion of a doctrine, information from other texts, or understandings and experiences from our own settings and cultures. It is impossible to preach by keeping the biblical text in the sermon exactly as it is in the Bible. A good preacher thus ensures that the text is rendered faithfully, such that the uttered word is the Word that God intends (23–24).

- 1) What is the difference between ensuring a text is rendered faithfully and simply reproducing the text?
- 2) In order to use the texts sacramentally, what pieces of information need to be added to texts that don't explicitly name the Sacraments?
- 3) How might this be abused?
- 4) Why is humility in the preacher necessary to render a text faithfully?
- 5) What scholarly skills are likewise necessary?

1.3 CONGREGATIONAL CONTEXT:

A. General description: God has called you into the office of preaching in a specific place and to a particular people. Part of the art of preaching involves discerning how sacramental preaching relates to your congregational context. Preachers always need to know their hearers and their needs. If you haven't engaged in an activity to help consider your listeners please look back at some of the earlier modules in this series. This module is going to focus on the contextual realities that have to do with where the pastor is seeking to lead and encourage the congregation's sacramental practice and also their life together.

B. Module materials: In this segment, you will converse about these things and your congregations' practices, especially where they are lacking, and consider how these ideas and skill will be most effectively practiced as you preach to your people.

Exercise 1: My congregation's Communion practices

In this exercise each of you will describe how often your congregation celebrates Holy Communion and where the practice could be strengthened. Besides frequency, other things to consider are how accepting the congregation is of closed communion, how the elements are prepared and disposed of if not consumed after the service, and whether or not the people are preparing for the Sacrament appropriately. While not as central, ceremonies are also important, and the pastor should have goals about improving the practice over all, even if it is as simple as improving altar guild meetings.

Crucial in the discussion will be your determination of how to preach sacramentally without making the pulpit into a bully pulpit. How do you address the weaknesses or less than ideal situation in your preaching without lecturing the people, but instead upholding the joy and comfort of God's promises?

Exercise 2: My congregation's understanding of occasional services

In this exercise each of you will describe your congregation's occasional services, with a special emphasis on confirmation, weddings and funerals.

Rather than carry on about the common misunderstandings that often surround these services and break down into simply telling horror stories, engage in a

discussion that focuses on what weddings and pre-marital counseling, funerals and end of life pastoral care, and catechism and confirmation could be if they were viewed as Means of Grace. After some time imagining that, consider how preaching at these events could extol some of these ideals in a way that is non-threatening to the participants and how these ideals might be upheld in preaching throughout the year.

FOR THE NEXT STEPS:

Determine within your group your plans for viewing the sermons you will record in your congregations. Will they be viewed together at your next meeting or viewed by each of you in advance? (Instructions for uploading sermons to facilitate viewing in advance are given in the following section.) Be sure the host site of the next meeting has the technology you need.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR FURTHER STUDY:

If you want to pursue further study on Sacramental Preaching, the following books might be of interest:

Louth, Andrew. *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*. Wichita, KS: Eighth Day Press, 1983.

Pulse, Jeffrey. *The Joseph Narratives*. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, n.d.

Scaer, David P. *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace*. St. Louis: Luther Academy, 2008.

———. *Baptism*. St. Louis: Luther Academy, 1999.

Stephenson, John R. *The Lord's Supper*. St. Louis: Luther Academy, 2003.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *God Sense: Reading the Bible for Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.

Phase 2:

PASTORAL PRACTICE - PREACHING AND RESPONSE IN THE CONGREGATIONAL SETTING

After the first meeting of the triad, you will put what you have learned into practice in a sermon.

Each pastor will preach a sermon that uses what he has learned in this module and engage in some form of feedback with congregational members. The sermon will be recorded so that it can be uploaded and discussed in the second meeting of the triad.

2.1 PREACHING AND RESPONSE:

A. General description: Having discussed sacramental preaching with brother pastors, you will now preach a sermon in which you use what you have learned in a way that is appropriate for your congregation. In addition to preaching the sermon, you will engage in conversation with members of your congregation using one of the exercises provided. Since the sermon will also be used in the next meeting of the triad, you will want to record the sermon so that it can be uploaded and viewed by members of the triad.

B. Module materials: In this section, you will choose one of three options (or create your own) for facilitating conversations with your members about sacramental preaching. The first option guides a post-sermon conversation with your members through a simple response form. The second exercise facilitates learning and discussion with your members before and after the sermon. The third exercise uses Bible class and two surveys, one before and one after the sermon.

Choose one of these exercises or create your own exercise to guide interaction with your members in relation to the sermon.

Exercise 1: Post-sermon conversation

Group selection: Identify five or six members of the congregation who will meet with you after the sermon and discuss how the sermon informed their sacramental understanding or raised their appreciation. You may choose to offer an open invitation for members to participate in this exercise or you may select the members by personally inviting them. When selecting members, you may think about working with particular groups of people in the congregation (e.g., the elders, the confirmands, the new member class, etc.).

If part of your purpose is to move the congregation toward increasing Eucharistic frequency or modifying practice, you may want to include members that you know are leery of this, as their feedback will be critical.

Listener reflection: Ask the members participating in the exercise to listen to the sermon and, after reflecting on it, write out answers to questions you have given them. You may either draw up your own list of questions or use the questions below as a guide.

Group discussion: Meet with the members and proceed through the questions as you guide group discussion about the Sacraments and Means of Grace.

Remember that demonstrating a spirit of openness to feedback and gratitude for your members who are participating in this exercise will encourage honest and helpful feedback. Be honest about your goals in moving the congregation. Recognize that

while your goal is to improve your ability to preach about these things, these are topics that matter deeply to the members, and this could create some conflict.

Sample response sheet

Please answer the following questions regarding the sermon:

- 1) By the time the sermon was over, was it clear to you that the sermon was directing you to a specific place for comfort? If so, where?
- 2) Did the sermon help you see a new facet of the Sacraments? Explain your response.
- 3) Did the sermon help you to see how the Bible talks about the Sacraments more than you thought or show you a place that teaches about the Sacraments that you didn't realize?
- 4) Did the sermon feel as if it was opening a particular passage or story in the Bible or did it feel more like a lecture from confirmation instruction? Does that matter to you? Did the sermon give you what you expect from a sermon? Why or why not?
- 5) What would you like me as a preacher to know as you consider how the Sacraments function in your life and in our church?

Exercise 2: Conversations before and after the sermon

Group selection: Identify five or six members of the congregation who will interact with you before and after the sermon to discuss the role of the Sacraments in their lives and in your congregation. You may choose to offer an open invitation for members to participate in this exercise or you may select the members by personally inviting them. When selecting members, you may think about working with particular groups of people in the congregation (e.g., the elders, the confirmands, the new member class, etc.).

Be aware: it is almost inevitable that the people you invite will have criticisms or concerns about the congregation's practice (individual cups, closed Communion, gluten-free and alcohol issues, wedding policies, confirmation age, etc.). Inviting them will give you the chance to converse and catechize them, but it could also open you and the congregation to criticism that is painful to hear and inaccurate or mis-informed. While that is not pleasant, that information is good fodder for preaching on the Sacraments. Be honest with your members about what you can and cannot tolerate and also what your goals are, if any, in moving your congregation's practice.

Pre-sermon conversation: Meet with the members at some point before you preach the sermon. Ask them questions to discern their level of understanding and also their piety. What do they think the ideal practices are and why? Take time also to catechize them about the Sacraments and the Means of Grace. Perhaps take them through a sacramental motif or share other information that you have learned or been reminded of in this module. This will not only be good for them but will also help prepare them to hear the sermon.

Reflecting on their experience of the topic: For processing reflections about the Sacraments, you might ask group members to reflect on the liturgy itself or think back

about how God works through means in their lives.

Listener reflection: Ask the members participating in the exercise to listen to the sermon and then, after reflecting on it and comparing it to their reflections on the liturgy or your earlier meeting and their own expectations and desires for congregation practices, to meet with you for more discussion. You may draw up a list of questions for them to consider or use the questions above.

Post-sermon conversation: Meet with the members and discuss their response to your sermon that emphasized the Sacraments. Open the meeting by reflecting on what you learned and discussed in your pre-sermon conversation. This calls to mind the doctrinal definitions of the Sacraments and also how your congregation expresses these realities through its practice.

After this review, invite open discussion of their experience of the sermon. If needed, you may begin the conversation by explaining what you tried to do in the sermon with regard to the Sacraments. It would be ideal if they were able to come up with this on their own, but they may need a little help. Or, if you have drawn up a list of questions for them to answer, proceed through the questions as you guide group discussion.

Remember that demonstrating a spirit of openness to feedback and gratitude for your members who are participating in this exercise will encourage honest and helpful feedback. Be honest about your goals in moving the congregation. Recognize that while your goal is to improve your ability to preach about these things, these are things that matter deeply to the members, and this could create some conflict.

Exercise 3: The whole Bible class and surveys

Group selection and pre-sermon activity: This exercise will use the entire Sunday morning Bible class. Before the sermon is preached, have your Bible class fill out a short survey designed to ascertain their level of understanding of what a Sacrament is and what Sacraments give and also what the Means of Grace are. Inspiration for these questions can be found in the Explanation to the Small Catechism.

What do you want them to know? Keep the survey short — no more than fifteen questions. Questions can be either true/false or multiple choice, but should not be essay questions. They should be anonymous. Do not discuss the surveys.

Collect the surveys and collate the data. This information can help you prepare a sermon that addresses specific weaknesses. The survey also will plant some ideas in your Bible class members and begin them thinking about the topic.

Post-sermon activity: Give your Bible class the same survey at the first meeting after you preach the sermon. Collect the surveys.

Option 1. Engage immediately in a discussion of what the first surveys revealed and how your sermon attempted to answer and respond to them. Make up your own questions or use the questions above to guide the discussion and ascertain if the sermon was effective or not.

Remember that demonstrating a spirit of openness to feedback and gratitude for your members who are participating in this exercise will encourage honest and helpful feedback. Be honest about your goals in moving the congregation. Recognize that while your goal is to improve your ability to preach about these things, these are things that matter deeply to the members, and this could create some conflict.

If time permits, conduct a brief Bible study on the Sacraments, perhaps taking the class through a sacramental motif that crosses several familiar Bible stories.

Option 2. Conduct Bible class as normal on the day of the second survey. Collate the

data during the week and then bring all the survey results to the next Bible class. Then proceed as in option 1.

2.2 UPLOADING THE SERMON:

A. General description: Before the next meeting of the triad, you may wish to upload a video of your sermon to the internet so that it can be watched prior to the meeting by the other members of your group. You may also choose to email them the manuscript of the sermon.

B. Module materials: Before you preach the sermon, make a test video recording of yourself in the preaching space. This will enable you to make any adjustments to lighting, sound and visual representation so that the video recording of the sermon is of excellent quality.

After recording the sermon, upload the video for use by the members of your group. If you do not have a church website to which you are uploading the video, you may use either YouTube or Vimeo. If you want your video to remain private, you may use the privacy settings in YouTube or password protect the video in Vimeo. For more information about uploading videos for private viewing, see the video-based instructions readily available upon an internet search for “how do I upload a private video to YouTube?” or “How do I password protect a video on Vimeo?”

Phase 3:

TRIAD MEETING - REFLECTIONS ON YOUR PRACTICE OF TEXTUAL PREACHING

The second meeting of the triad completes the practice-reflection model of learning. You will watch one another's sermons, reflect with one another on your practice of sacramental preaching, and consider how to continue to grow in this area.

3.1 WATCHING THE SERMONS:

A. General description: Depending on the preference of the group, the videos may be watched before the group meets, or you may watch the sermons together as a group. Pastors will view the sermons and converse about how they more intentionally tried to preach sacramentally. If the videos are to be viewed prior to the meeting, each pastor will upload a video of his sermon so that it may be viewed in advance.

B. Module materials: In this section, you will find three exercises that prepare you for reflecting with the preachers in your group on sacramental preaching.

You may use one of these exercises or create your own form of response.

Exercise 1: Assessment through discussion and checklist

- 1) Watch the video of the sermon.
- 2) Identify what the preacher did well to expound the biblical text in a sacramental way.
- 3) Use the “Checklist for Sacramental Preaching” given in Section 1.2 as an assessment tool with a readiness to discuss with the preacher what he did well and what

could have been done differently or better. Be gentle.

Exercise 2: Assessment through guided reflection

View the video of the sermon.

- 1) Identify one section where the preacher opened up a sacramental aspect of the text that either might not have been obvious or expected or which was helpfully thorough and insightful.
- 2) Consider how this sermon would have been heard in your context with your practice. What might have been helpful and what might have caused tension in your hearers? Remembering what the preacher told you of his context and goals, how do you think this fit in his place?
- 2) Suggest how else the preacher might have expanded his best section or what other language he could have used from the text to direct hearers to the Means of Grace. Be gentle.

Exercise 3: Assessment through solicited feedback

- 1) Before viewing the sermon, contact that preacher and ask if there are any specific questions he would like you to consider when reflecting on his preaching.
- 2) View the video of the sermon.
- 3) Answer the questions provided by the preacher. Be sure to use concrete examples from specific moments in the sermon to support your responses.

3.2 PASTORAL CONVERSATION:

A. General description: After viewing the sermons, you will engage in pastoral conversation with members of your group. Each member should have the opportunity to have his sermon processed by the group.

There are three purposes to this conversation: (1) to assess how effectively the sermon confessed the Sacraments and whether or not it did so in a way that was faithful to the biblical text; (2) to process the congregational response to the sermon and their reception to a more focused sacramental preaching and what problems this might create for the preacher; and, finally, (3) to consider how to improve this aspect of preaching in the future.

B. Module materials: After viewing the sermon, the members of the triad will reflect with the preacher on how well he engaged the text to confess the Sacraments.

For each preacher, the following process might be used to guide the conversation:

- 1) Preacher's reflections: The preacher whose sermon is being discussed begins the conversation. He introduces the sermon by describing how he intentionally tried to include sacramental language and emphasis and what he desired for the congregation regarding both what comfort they would find here and how their piety and even practice might be shaped. He identifies what he felt were his strengths and weaknesses in this aspect of preaching. He might show clips from the sermon for discussion.
- 2) Triad's response: The other members of the group enter the conversation when appropriate to affirm or clarify the self-evaluation of the preacher and to share their

observations and insights about the preacher’s effective engagement of the biblical text to confess the Sacraments in his sermon.

3) Preacher’s summary of congregational reflection: The preacher summarizes the experience of conversing with the congregation. He identifies (1) what he learned about his preaching context, along with possible problems he anticipates if he wants to move the congregation’s practice and (2) how the congregation responded to his intentional attempt at being more sacramental in his preaching.

4) Preacher’s plan for future growth: The conversation next looks to the future with the preacher and the members of the group identifying strengths that the preacher brings to the task. The preacher then shares his plan for continued improvement in preaching the Sacraments from a variety of texts. What will he change, amplify or delete from his practice so that the text is more readily heard and received by his hearers as sacramental and pointing to the Means of Grace?

The preachers in the group conclude by praying for one another’s preaching and sacramental practices that they would be faithful and that the Lord would grant them patience and wisdom. Prayers may focus on the needs and commitments expressed in their conversation.

*The Rev. Dr. David H. Petersen
Pastor, Redeemer Lutheran Church
Fort Wayne, Indiana*

