HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD:
HOW THE PRACTICE OF LEARNING SCRIPTURES BY HEART
AND PERFORMING THEM IN WORSHIP TRANSFORMS PREACHING

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BY
PETER S. BUEHLER

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ABSTRACT

Peter S. Buehler

Hear the Word of the Lord: How the Practice of Learning Scriptures by Heart and Performing Them in Worship Transforms Preaching

If sermons begin with the hearing of God's Word--first by preachers in their studies and then by worshippers in the pews--then the quality, clarity, and depth of that hearing is of utmost importance. The thesis will demonstrate that when preachers follow a practice of learning scriptures by heart for performance in worship their hearing--and therefore their preaching--improves. As the field of Oral Interpretation shows, the Bible, an oral/aural work, is best heard when performed. Worshippers listen intently and hear keenly; moreover, by internalizing texts pastors preach sermons from a personal encounter with the Word. The thesis will explore not only how hearers' attention is captured when scripture is performed but also how the weekly practice of learning passages by heart focuses the preacher's attention, engages the imagination, informs exegesis, and guides sermon preparation. It will examine how the Bible and scholarly literature understand hearing. Through the writer's own story and the survey comments of parishioners, the thesis will tell how the discipline transforms preaching and preacher. Hardly an added burden to a pastoral workload or a talent only a gifted few can claim, the case will be made that learning preaching texts by heart for performance in worship is a rich spiritual discipline, even a means of grace.
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CHAPTER 1
CAPTURED BY A PERFORMANCE: A JOURNEY OF HEARING

Can Saltiness Be Restored?

*It was as if Jesus were in front of me, speaking directly to me.* My weekly practice of learning scriptures by heart began in that room, in that moment, with a deep desire for my congregation to experience first-hand what I had experienced: the presence of Jesus through a performance of the words of Jesus.¹

David Rhoads's presentation of Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, was no mere recitation of scripture--an oral version of a written text.² Nor was it a tour de force, a highlighting of one man's ability to memorize and perform a lengthy passage from a Gospel. The effect was stunningly different: the performer disappeared, the Teacher took the stage. Suddenly Jesus had a voice and a body. He looked me in the eye. He kept me glued to my seat. Familiar words were new words, not only in meaning but in effect. "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" *You mean me? My ministry? My preaching?* How was it that these well-known words of Jesus bypassed my defenses and went straight to my soul? And how was it that my reaction was one of excitement, not indictment? Was I being given an answer to a

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¹ Richard Ward in his book *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching.* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 60, advocates the use of the term *performance* as a word which "clarifies our theology of communication for speaking (scripture) texts aloud." Its literal meaning, "form coming through," helpfully suggests the purpose of the oral communication of scripture. Additionally, *performance* brings to mind the text's performative potential, the transformation of the hearer. Though some in my congregation have said that *performance* sounds "too Broadway," I use the term in this paper. "Putting on an act" is, in fact, contrary to the meaning of the word.

² Professor David Rhoads delivered the Wardlaw Lectures for the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS) D.Min in Preaching Program at the Lutheran School of Theology in
frighteningly large question? For that matter, was it even possible that a veteran
preacher's saltiness could be restored? What about a church's saltiness?

What began as a desire to share with my congregation my experience of hearing
God's Word has since become an exegetical and hermeneutical tool for preaching as well
as a personal spiritual practice. I had not anticipated either! My hope initially was solely
for the church to hear the Bible as it was originally heard: orally, and therefore
powerfully and personally. All I knew was that this seemed important. I had no thought
about the consequences. I did not imagine a change in my preaching. I did not expect my
sermon preparation to vary. I did not think about anything except how I was being drawn
to this new thing.

In truth, the thought of learning even short lectionary passages was daunting. I did
not trust my memory. Memorization scared me. A manuscript preacher for three decades,
my eyes did not stray long from the printed page. Aside from brief passages of my
tradition's liturgy--parts of the communion service, a few Benedictions--I knew little "by
heart."³ How do you do it, anyway? How long does it take? I'm too busy as it is; I don't
have the time! Moreover, the thought of such a practice made me feel like a beginner, a
novice rather than a seasoned preacher. Why try something like this now? And what
would happen if, standing in front of the congregation on Sunday morning, my mind
went blank and I forgot what I had learned? Was it worth the added stress and anxiety?

Chicago, in Augustana Chapel, on June 30, and July 1 and 2, 2008. His performance of Matthew
5-7 concluded the lectures.

³ Kristin Linklater, Freeing the Natural Voice (Hollywood: Drama Publishers, 2006), 349, prefers
this "old-fashioned" term over memorizing, as do I. She writes compellingly: "You need to absorb
the words of the character you are playing into your inner landscape. You need to be breathing
the words in so that the underlying thoughts become feelings and the cellular make-up of your
body starts to rearrange itself in response."
Wasn't the weekly task of preaching enough of a burden? And if I did try it, if I performed a scripture once, wouldn't the congregation expect it every Sunday?

**Startled by Scripture: One Mainline Church's Response**

First Presbyterian Church of Santa Barbara could be a microcosm of its denomination. Celebrating its one-hundred-fortieth anniversary in 2009, it is the fourth-oldest Protestant church in this proud community of ninety-thousand residents. Yet like other mainline congregations, First Presbyterian Church has experienced not only numerical decline—from two thousand members in the 1960s to some five hundred in 2010—but a significant challenge to attract and retain younger people as well, many of whom worship at nondenominational churches. A more typical mainline scenario could not be found. Some ecclesiastical soul-searching, guided by the candid observations and tough recommendations of a church consultant, brought about a needed commitment to excellence in worship. While improvement was noted and a sense of new vitality was felt by parishioners, I sensed that if the church were going to move forward, I needed to move forward. *If risks needed to be taken, I needed to be the first to take them.* Enrolling in a D.Min. in Preaching Program was a step in that direction. Learning and performing scripture, I believed, was another. Would it not serve to make the Bible come alive? Was this not where renewal ought to start? Was not the *hearing* of scripture, the internalizing of the Word, where real transformation could happen—not only in the congregation but in

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4 An historic city, the first permanent European residents in Santa Barbara (not including the Chumash Indians, whose ancestors date back 13,000 years) were Spanish missionaries, particularly Fr. Junipero Serra, under whose leadership the Santa Barbara mission was built (1786)—one of twenty-one California missions constructed between 1769-1823. Only ninety miles north of Los Angeles, today Santa Barbara is a travel destination as well as an education and county government center. The community is known for its natural beauty and Spanish-style architecture, as well as its temperate year-round climate.
the preacher?

On the first Sunday of my new practice people were somewhat startled and distracted (Did he have that passage memorized?). Today, some two-and-a-half years later, change in the church is evident. Not only is there considerable anticipation about hearing scripture on Sunday morning, but there is also a sense among worshippers that the sermon is joined to the text in a way that is organic, obvious, and real. In parishioners' words:

"(The preacher's performance of the scripture) pulls me into the experience and makes us all one--pastor and congregants. I hear and experience it differently and it causes me to become more involved in the sermon that follows."

"This 'by heart' has become very important to me because I hear the meaning more to my heart and mind. I don’t exactly know why it affects (me) but it does...I listen more intently to the sermon and hear the meaning of the verse."

"It breathes life into the sermon. It opens the door to the sermon’s purpose and ideas. It creates coherence in this part of the worship experience."  

If the benefit of scripture learned and performed is clear for worshippers, its value is even more evident for the preacher. Rather than an added burden to a busy schedule, the weekly practice of learning the sermon scripture by heart has been a welcome way of engaging and discovering; a means for opening my mind and heart to the voice of the text; a way to listen to my life, my faith, and my imagination. It is an opportunity to be present to the Spirit and the Spirit's Word to the church. Simply put, it has become for me

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5 Written comments from an August 29, 2010 congregational survey on the question, How does the giving of the scripture "by heart" affect your experience of the sermon? See Appendix B (Survey Comments). Data from the survey show that the congregation strongly values the practice. In response to the questions: Did the way the scripture lesson was presented/performed affect your experience of the scripture (your hearing, understanding, and/or personal response)? and Did the way the scripture lesson was presented affect your experience of the sermon (your hearing, understanding, and/or personal response)?—on a 1-5 scale (1 = not very much, 5 = very much)—the response was 94% responding with 4's and 5's to the first question, and 92% with 4's and 5's to the second question. See Appendix A.
a spiritual practice and a means of grace, a way for preacher and parishioners to hear the Word of the Lord.

**Why It's Needed: A Theology of the Word for Today's Church**

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts (Ps 85:8).

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ (Rom 10:17).

You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Pet 1:23).

The scriptures attest to the role speaking and hearing play in the foundation and formation of faith. God not only creates heaven and earth with words (Gen 1:3 ff.), God also creates a people by calling them (Hos 11:1b). Their response of faith is summarized in the *Shema* of Deuteronomy, which begins, "Hear, O Israel" (Deut 6:4). Wilhelm Mundle further observes, "The prominence of hearing in the Old Testament is demonstrated by the frequency of the phrases thus says the Lord and the word of the Lord came.⁶ Implicit in biblical theology, therefore, is the idea that God's speech is powerful because it is performative: God's Word accomplishes God's purpose (Isa 55:10-11). Indeed, the Old and New Testaments' own vocabulary for hearing—šāmā and ἀκούω (or ἀκοή)—denote the depth of the Word's effect on hearers: not only their listening but also their accepting, understanding, and obeying what is heard.⁷ The transforming power of the Word—the connectedness of hearing and doing—is the Bible's

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⁷ Ibid., 173, 174.
clear witness. Moreover, just as God's people hear, so God hears. As Mundle points out, "It is in this way that the living God differs from idols which have ears but do not hear" (Ps 115; 135:17). In the New Testament, God's voice, incarnate in Jesus Christ, is heard, recognized, trusted, and obeyed (John 10:3, 16, 27). The voice from heaven at the transfiguration makes clear that listening to Jesus is the primary calling of disciples (Mark 9:7; Matt 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36). For those called to the ministry of proclamation, to giving voice to Jesus' voice, the New Testament's message is more emphatic still: the preaching (πίμα) of Christ is inseparable from hearing (ἀκοή) Christ (Rom 10:17).³

The integral role of hearing in preaching notwithstanding, Barbara Lundblad helpfully addresses the reality many in this ministry face: "After years of preaching, how can we hear the words as though for the first time? How can the words of the text 'seize' us if we're already certain what a text means?"⁹ Parishioners could well ask the same question. If the scriptures attest to the performative power of God's Word, why is it that the reading of that Word in church today is often a non-event, a time in the service when hearing in the biblical sense—listening, accepting, and understanding that leads to obeying—is unlikely to happen? As Richard Ward observes:

The reading should shift our attention to the question, What might God have to say to this gathered group through the reading of these words? Instead, the occasion calls attention to the reader's lack of preparation, the vast distance between the world of the text and the listener's own, and the amount of time it takes to simply get to something more interesting. This creates very little anticipation in the mind and heart of the listener to hear what the preacher might


have to say on this particular text.\textsuperscript{10}

Ward's lament and Lundblad's question focus preachers and parishioners on the issue of \textit{hearing}. If the witness of the scriptures and the story of the church suggest the power of God's speech--and the potential for human transformation--perhaps the issue has to do with removing barriers that impede hearing. If we preachers find ourselves searching high and low for new ideas in old texts, perhaps what's needed is stopping the search and taking time to internalize the Word. If our people expect little from Sunday morning Old and New Testament Lessons, or, alternatively, assume that familiar texts mean what they've always meant, perhaps what's needed is texts performed rather than read. Proclamation, Charles Bartow states, is "God's human speech"--yet Bartow is quick to point out that the place sermons begin is the "public reading of the Scriptures."	extsuperscript{11} Given this truth, engaging hearers in the texts on which sermons are based should be the first task of preaching. Moreover, it is fair to say that if church members look to their pastor to show how God's Word changes lives, how better to begin a sermon than with evidence that the Word has changed the preacher's life. A deeply internalized Word is a beginning indeed.

If we preachers find ourselves weary of preaching and fearful of a well gone dry--if studying harder yields nothing new, and searching for good stories feels like looking for four-leaf clovers--then perhaps our calling is to be a blank slate for God's Word. Can we trust the possibility that hearing leads to preaching?


CHAPTER 2
ORALITY AND HERMENEUTICS: HEARING THE SPOKEN WORD

What Worshippers Seek: The Word as Event

We live in a world of words. Whether spoken or written, heard from the television or radio, in conversations or emails at home or at work—or in text messages in-between—we spend our days beneath an avalanche of words. Silence for most of us is a rarity, something experienced fleetingly at the beginning and end of the day. Our hours are filled with talking and listening, reading and writing. By one estimate, we consume 100,500 words every day.\(^\text{12}\) Even more remarkably, the amount we read has tripled from 1980 to 2008.\(^\text{13}\) Given this ever-increasing barrage of words, how is the Word of God to be heard? How is it different from all the others? *Is it different from all the others?*

The issue is a critical one for today's church. Martin Luther's maxim, "The church is not a pen-house but a mouth-house,"\(^\text{14}\) is today a more mixed message, due not only to the widespread use of visual media in worship--Power Point and video presentations--but also to our diminished expectation of the power of the spoken word. We hear so many of them! Words in church, we realize, must be used with greater care. More significantly, the church must reclaim its speaking voice, knowing that, as Richard Lischer states, "The spoken word possesses the greatest potential for communication in depth."\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^\text{12}\) Source: University of California, San Diego, "By the numbers," *Real Simple*, August 2010, 146.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid. The use of computers, e-mail, and the internet is the likely reason for the increase.


Today's parishioners, while wary of words, would not disagree. Preachers are becoming increasingly aware that worshippers no longer come on Sunday morning, as Charles Bartow puts it, to listen for ideas; rather they come to be changed.\textsuperscript{16} The goal of preaching--and, it could be said, of the performance of scripture as the beginning of the preaching moment--is "to invite listeners into the divine presence and to evoke wonder and possibility."\textsuperscript{17} More than ever, worshippers hope to be moved, shaped, and transformed by the spoken Word of God. The Word's inherent potential is well defined by Bartow:

The Word of God is face to face, oral-aural situated, and suasory discourse. It is not a dead letter. It is not reason alone. It is an event of actio divina (God's self-performance, if you will). It is in fact God's human speech.\textsuperscript{18}

Indeed, the reading of scripture in Sunday worship has the potential to be an "event" where God is present and active. The growing interest in scripture by heart, in biblical storytelling, and in riveting public performances of entire Gospels (and New Testament Letters) suggests that the face to face telling of God's Word is a compelling, if not a life-changing event.\textsuperscript{19} Given the Word's power and the people's hunger, \textit{why not raise expectations for our corporate worship!} How different church could be if the


\textsuperscript{17} McKenzie, Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Bartow, \textit{God's Human Speech}, 3.

\textsuperscript{19} Two excellent scripture by heart organizations are GoTell Communications (www.gotell.org), and the Network of Biblical Storytellers, International (www.nbsint.org). Classes, curriculum, bibliographies, and conferences are available, as well as numerous links to further resources.
scripture lesson(s) were not "a mere pretext for the sermon," but instead an encounter with God's voice, a voice to which the sermon listens and responds.

Yet how is it that biblical passages learned by heart and performed in worship have this effect? What is the difference for a congregation when a passage of scripture is not read but told? What happens when the preacher's eyes are fixed on them and not on the book?

**Insights from Oral Interpretation**

In his ground-breaking essay, "The Strange Silence of the Bible," Donald Juel takes issue with the academy and the church's preference for the written word over the spoken word, a preference which, Juel argues, effectively silences the scriptures. He writes:

…as a professional interpreter of the New Testament, I am increasingly struck that much biblical interpretation occurs without the Bible ever having been read….I mean exegesis is carried on without ever reading aloud, especially in a public setting where one reads and others listen. Actual engagement with the biblical text is an essentially private encounter, done best in a library or study. Commentaries are consulted and papers written without ever voicing words that were written to be heard. It is not only that pastors are given little training in public reading. The whole interpretive enterprise suggests that public reading is unimportant to understanding the scriptures. The Bible is a mute companion whose access to the imagination is dramatically limited to the sense of sight.21

For me, hearing was what other people did--those who came to hear me preach on Sunday. From Monday to Saturday my eyes did all the work. It was no wonder that my sermons, though well-written, seemed to come out in someone else's voice. Fixed, albeit unconsciously, on the written word, I found myself indifferent to my own

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preaching. More comfortable with engaging only a part of myself—and only a part of 
God’s Word—my sermons explained God but rarely evoked God.22 Little did I realize that 
my one-dimensional approach to the Bible, my “mute companion,” was limiting my 
experience of God’s Word as well as my congregation’s. As Richard Ward explains:

How the narrator sounds is not something the text gives us on the surface. Neither 
is it found through use of a method of interpretation that does not take the oral 
character of the Scripture into account. A meaningful sounding of the text has to 
be discovered, then expressed using the materials a student has available, namely, 
the voice and the body.23

Recognizing the oral character of the scriptures has become key to my hearing of God’s 
voice, a voice which I seek to express in my own.

The Bible itself is vocal. It is where we go to hear what the Lord God has to say to 
us personally, as a faith community, and as a society. Recent orality/literacy scholarship 
has shown that the change occurring in the first century of the common era involving the 
increase of literate communication in the Hellenistic world, both in rabbinic Judaism and 
early Christianity, was as complex an historical process as it was dramatic.24 While it 
is tempting for interpreters today to suggest absolutes regarding evidence for 
an ancient orality or emerging literacy in the Bible, nevertheless the words we read today in 
the pages of scripture are primarily oral in character. Particularly in New Testament texts, 
"composed in writing, dictated to a secretary, or composed orally and written down after 
a relatively short period of oral transmission,"25 the style of writing was very close to

22 The categories are McKenzie’s, 58.

Emphasis is Ward’s.

24 Thomas E. Boomershine, "Jesus of Nazareth and the Watershed of Ancient Orality and 

25 Ibid., 11.
speech.\textsuperscript{26} In the biblical world, writing served the ear, not the eye--even if, as Thomas Boomershine suggests, "Christians (in the post-70 CE period) were aggressive in the appropriation of the communications technology of literacy."\textsuperscript{27} Still, the message and the person of Jesus were understood to be "inextricably tied to the spoken word, not to texts."\textsuperscript{28}

Walter Ong, the Jesuit scholar whose name is most closely connected with orality studies, not only offers insight into the thought processes of primary oral cultures (those in which writing and print have not been introduced), he also provides students of the Bible with an awareness of the power of oral-aural communication as distinct from written communication (or, we could add, the public reading of written communication).\textsuperscript{29} Ong offers three distinctive potentialities of the scriptures' orality for performing and preaching. First, \textit{spoken words have the potential to communicate at a level of depth}. "Sound," writes Ong, "has to do with interiors as such, which means with interiors as manifesting themselves, not as withdrawn into themselves, for true interiority

\footnotesize


\textsuperscript{27} Boomershine, "Jesus of Nazareth and the Watershed of Ancient Orality and Literacy," 11.


\textsuperscript{29} In his book, \textit{Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word} (London: Routledge, 1982), 36-57, Ong offers nine specific characteristics of orally based thought. While beyond the scope of this paper, Ong's observations serve not only to explain orality in detail but also provide the reader with a view of what is lost in a culture when literacy predominates. The "agonistically toned" thought of primary oral people (43-45), for example--the sense of striving and struggle in both speech and life, as compared to the more abstract or disengaged mentality of literate people--well serves, in fact, those worship leaders today who would learn scripture by heart to perform in worship. Embodying, even exaggerating, life's struggles--particularly those eloquently expressed in the scriptures--shows that God's Word addresses all dimensions of human life.
is communicative. Studying the scriptures from the perspective of their orality, therefore--and learning texts in order to perform them publicly--is to move one's hermeneutic from head to heart, imagining where and how a scripture moves its hearers, uniting them as a believing community, inviting them into God's presence. Second, spoken words have the potential to engage, thereby communicating the urgency of faith. Ong would agree with Werner Kelber who writes:

It could be said that the impact Jesus made on friends and foes alike was to no small degree due to his choice and implementation of the oral medium. Spoken words breathe life, drawing their strength from sound. They carry a sense of presence, intensity, and instantaneousness that writing fails to convey.

Third, spoken words have the greatest potential for evoking a sense of wonder and possibility. As Ong proposes, "the mystery of sound...is the most productive of understanding and unity, the most personally human, and in this sense closest to the divine." It is not an overstatement to suggest that attention to the orality of the scriptures--to internalizing them so that they may be spoken and heard as they were meant to be spoken and heard--is key to vital worship and dynamic preaching.

Learning from Performance Studies

The term "performance" causes uneasiness for preachers. We are, after all, individuals who strive for authenticity and honesty in our preaching. What we do on Sunday morning is at the core of our life's work. We may stand behind a pulpit, but we are never more exposed and vulnerable than when we preach. We are also highly

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31 Kelber, 18-19.

32 Ong, The Presence of the Word, 324.
sensitive when it comes to needing and wanting our parishioners' attention during our preaching. Yet it is their attention—even more their engagement and interest—that we must gain and hold. For this reason we plumb our sermon files and our memories for stories, personal anecdotes, wise sayings, verses of poetry, scenes from movies and television, and preachable moments from church life in order to underscore preaching points and add life to our messages. We strive for preaching that is engaging, honest, and true to scripture. We seek to make Christ's grace and mercy real. And dare we say it? We aim to inspire, all the while "being ourselves" in the pulpit. It's no wonder we bristle when a well-meaning congregation member winks at us on our way into the sanctuary and says with a wry smile, "Showtime!"

"Performance," however, is no dirty word; it is a helpful and encouraging word. Particularly for self-conscious preachers—so many of us being unschooled in the performing arts—learning scripture by heart, rehearsing it out loud, and performing it in Sunday worship is a way of getting outside of ourselves and inside the world of the text. The paradox is not insignificant: by taking a biblical text deeply within, learning it "by heart," then giving voice to it—giving our voice to it—we are free to engage many voices: the text's, our theological tradition's, our congregation's, our society's, our world's. As performance studies scholar Ronald Pelias writes, "The performer's primary concern lies with using performance as a way of knowing rather than as an artifact or product. The performer pursues performance work in order to make experience intelligible" (emphasis

33 Richard Lischer (The End of Words, 76) writes, "Ask most preachers what they strive for stylistically, and the majority will reply, 'To be myself in the pulpit.'" Lischer goes on to question this insistence: "...must our verbal key signature emerge from some hidden monolith called 'the person'? In classical thought the word 'person' meant the opposite of our concept of permanent identity. The persona was the mask through which the actor spoke (hence per-sonar, 'sounded through'). The actor's style depended on the contours of the mask." (Italics are Lischer's.)
mine).  

For preachers searching for sermon ideas in a scripture text, performance studies suggests an important corrective. Rather than approaching a text as a depository of potential points, one comes to it as a companion with whom a relationship is forged. Richard Ward suggests the liveliness of the relationship:

At some points the text will interrogate the reader, and at other points the reader will interrogate the text! If we are honest with one another and ourselves, we will also admit that sometimes we actually see ourselves in the text, hear ourselves being addressed and implicated by it. Leander Keck suggests that this is what "living with" the Bible looks like. He says "it is only by living with it that we can be influenced by it and can appropriate its ways of thinking and its vocabulary so that we know ourselves as part of the same family."  

I would go further. To truly live with a text--to experience its voice, its honesty, its emotion, its intensity, its presence (when least expected), and its mystery--entails learning that text by heart, internalizing it, and encountering it daily. In Pelias's words:

To allow another voice to speak in one's presence, to have a genuine conversation with another, to enjoy an intimate merger of self and other--that is the performer's ultimate goal. When performers neglect this goal, they deny their human potential and silence those who seek to be heard.

In a congregational setting, especially one where the pastor-preacher is busy performing various duties and listening to numerous voices, it is all too easy to silence the voice

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34 Ronald J. Pelias, Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 21. Charles Bartow, ("Who Says the Song? Practical Hermeneutics as Humble Performance," The Princeton Seminary Bulletin Vol. 17 No. 2 [1996], 2), speaking from a homiletics perspective, agrees: "I argue that performance is a way of coming to know and understand a biblical text and its persona in such a way that fresh insight is gained into what a text is, what it says (denotation), and what it signifies (connotation)."


36 See Appendix D. The experiences I describe are a few of many where the scripture texts I have learned for Sundays speak to me powerfully and personally.

37 Pelias, Performance Studies, 17.
which most needs to be heard, that of the scripture on which we plan to preach. If Jana Childers is right, that "To be known, a text must be performed," then internalizing that text on Monday for performance on Sunday is a valuable use of a preacher's time.

The goal, to be clear, is to "perform the Word in such a way that God's voice comes through." Performance studies lets preachers ponder a paradox: by giving a scripture our voice and body, our whole self, we get out of its way. In my experience, the better I know my scripture—the more comfortable and assured I am that I have it memorized—the more clearly the congregation will hear it. Clayton Schmit speaks of this level of engagement, preparation, and performance as excellence. Schmit recalls a worship experience where excellence was well evidenced:

The performances did not draw attention to themselves but drew the listeners and participants together into the experience of something new. In each instance, the presence of Christ was manifest as the people gathered and as God's Word was delivered through Scripture, song, ritual, and oration.

To have a parishioner write about a scripture performance of mine, "I feel the words of Jesus and the prophets speaking directly to me. It's as if they were at the podium," tells me that I knew it well enough to get out of its way.

A performance of scripture, however, is not a one-person show; as a part of liturgy, "the work of the people," it is not a show at all. Indeed, as performance studies teaches, the congregation itself plays a performative role. If God's Word is to "succeed in

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40 The image is Childers's *(Performing the Word, 49)*.
the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11d), then a successful performance leads to the congregation's own faith-in-action. If my parishioner felt that Jesus (or a prophet) was speaking directly to her, it was, in effect, the Lord's call to her to perform the word she heard. Charles Bartow is right: proclamation begins before the sermon starts.

Two points are significant if the congregation is to grasp its performative role. Though obvious, the first must not be overlooked: the people must be able "to make sense out of what they are seeing and hearing."42 Not only does this entail such things as the clarity of the speaker's voice and the quality of the acoustics in the worship space, it also requires personal engagement on the part of the congregation. To be truly heard performer and congregation must be with each other, even in dialogue with each other.43 Particularly in a worship setting, given the brevity of scripture readings, this first lesson of performance studies cannot be ignored. Indeed, if readings are poorly done, worshippers will disengage, hoping the sermon will make sense of the text. A pattern of disengagement, it could be argued, might easily lead to a suspicion that the Bible is inaccessible and incomprehensible--a regrettable conclusion for any follower of Luther or Calvin.44 My practice of performing scriptures prior to preaching would suggest, however, that it not only vastly improves the comprehension of texts--given the benefits

42 Pelias, Performance Studies, 144.

43 Ibid., 150.

44 On this point, Donald Juel ("The Strange Silence of the Bible," 14) writes: "Contemporary church practice...apparently...agrees that people are not to be trusted with interpretation. Lay readers in congregations would never dare offer a striking reading of a passage from the Bible. Even pastors hesitate. Verses are omitted by lectionary committees from the appointed readings because they might raise anxieties or elicit anger when read aloud. The result, however, has been a tradition of bland, uninteresting, unengaging oral treatment of the scriptures that undermines their ability to move and to shape imaginations. It also means traditional interpretations go unchallenged."
of constant eye contact and unimpeded vocal production, as well as a style of delivery qualitatively different from oral reading--but also facilitates a sense of dialogue with the congregation. They are attentive because something important, something meaningful, is happening.\textsuperscript{45}

A second factor in the congregation's performative role is the performer's attention, particularly in learning and rehearsing a scripture, to what Charles Bartow calls the "tensiveness" of the text: "the creative stresses and strains one is subjected to in the attempt to give (that text) voice and body."\textsuperscript{46} At stake is not only the hearers' level of interest--an interest communicated by the performer's own investment and engagement in the text--but also their sense that having heard the Word they must do something about it: listen more carefully to the sermon, discuss the message with loved ones, explore what was heard in a small group study, pray the scripture, and, ultimately, change an attitude and a behavior. Rather than smoothing out the bumps in the hearers' experience, a scripture performance that deals candidly with the opposing forces in a text serves the Word's performative purpose. Richard Lischer suggests what can happen:

Instead of taking the analytical step back from the text, the preacher leaps into the text, goes deep, and surfaces on some other shore. What the preacher comes up with is not so much a new meaning but a new performance of the text, one that will enable its listeners to perform it themselves in their daily lives.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} See Congregational Survey comments on "Comprehension" and "Attentiveness," Appendix C.


\textsuperscript{47} Lischer, The End of Words, 92.
A Challenge from the Theology of Sound

Much of a preacher's preparation for Sunday involves reading and writing, consequently most of us approach our preaching deadline in silence. Unless we participate in a lectionary study group, talk over our sermons with a spouse or friend (something I personally have never done), or head into the sanctuary on Sunday at sunrise for a final run-through, we do not hear with our ears what we plan to say with our voice. Those of us who write out sermons make an effort to write for the ear, not the eye, yet we are not likely to ask our congregations if what they are hearing sounds spoken or written to be spoken. There is a fundamental difference between the two and our people know it well. Reading written words, even our own written words, creates distance; it is unintended but it is real. While our people are quick to accept our preaching as it is, what they really want to hear is us. What they want to hear is a person, especially one they know and trust. Stephen Webb observes, "The disciples did not seem to care what Jesus looked like, since no physical descriptions of him or likenesses were passed down to later generations. But they cared about his voice." The same could be said today for those who come to hear us preach.

I will argue later in this paper that learning scriptures by heart for performance in Sunday worship is one way for manuscript preachers to move beyond a manuscript. There is a deeper issue involved, however--one that is fundamental to our vocation. Stephen Webb writes:

A theology of sound...suggests it is no accident that we humans take the form we do, because in the Son, God already anticipated us. God did not become incarnate in Jesus in order to be like us; we were created to be speakers and listeners, that

\[^{48}\text{Webb, The Divine Voice, 31.}\]
is, to be like Jesus Christ. 49

The one whose only writing was a few words in the dirt (Jn 8:6) is the one who invites us to speak his words. Webb would have us hear the voice of Karl Barth. In Barth's understanding, "It is the sound of scripture that saves us, not its appearance on the printed page." 50 Among the theology of sound's challenges to preachers, therefore—to those who devote hours to reading and writing—is the contention that time spent speaking and hearing the Word has the potential to transform. If sound goes deeper than sight, time set aside for speaking and hearing God's Word holds the promise of joining us to Christ in a winsome way. It is his voice that affirms ours in preaching.

49 Ibid., 195-196.

CHAPTER 3

SCRIPTURE BY HEART: DISCOVERING THE WORD

For preachers, Sunday is both the end and the climax of the week. The calendar and the Christian tradition indicate otherwise, of course—it is the Lord's Day, the first day of the week—but our experience, our life, is different. The week begins on Monday with our reality: next Sunday is not far off, yesterday's effort is a memory, and now we need to get going on a new sermon. Come, Holy Spirit! It's no wonder that opening the Bible on Monday—or Tuesday, if Monday is a day off—entails as much anxiety as it does anticipation. We're tempted to hastily fasten ourselves to a word in our text—or an idea, or an image—in order to get going, in order to have some sense of progress, some encouragement that a sermon will come. Lured by the pull of possible preaching points, we see in our Sunday scripture a convenient word rather than a transforming one.

For many of us, a different discipline is needed if we are to hear scripture on its own terms, if we are to discern themes for preaching that come from a genuine—and unhurried—encounter with the Word. It is for this reason that the practice of learning scripture by heart for performance on Sunday has the potential to transform how we approach preaching. It is a discipline which gently and reliably leads preachers into a discovery of God's Word: how it is spoken to us and how it speaks to our church through us.

Hardly a mechanical process, scripture by heart involves all of who we are: mind and body, heart and soul. If unhappy childhood memories of laborious rote memorization are all too clear and anxiety-ridden performances before teachers and live audiences are too easily recalled, these same hesitations and fears are addressed by a deep sense of
blessing that is God's Word learned, internalized, heard, and shared. The following categories: emptying and attending, imagining and embodying, and dramatizing and believing, suggest to the preacher not only a way of approaching scripture texts and conceiving sermons, but the special insight and understanding gained when one learns by heart scripture texts for performance and preaching.

Emptying and Attending

If Monday's weariness reflects Sunday's exertion, beginning a new week of sermon preparation with emptying ought to require no effort at all. With the practice of scripture by heart, however, there is an entirely different emptiness, even a quality of openness when a preacher prayerfully sits down with her scripture for next Sunday. Ironically, what she faces is the unfamiliarity of the text. What is known about the passage, even well known--its characters and plot; its words, phrases, places, and images; its charms and surprises--become new and different when the preacher sets out to learn the words with the goal of setting aside the printed page. If memorization is as difficult for adults as it is for children, a benefit of the difficulty is the reconsideration of one's assumptions, especially about scriptures on which one has previously preached. Emptying ourselves of the notion of knowledge and insight about our text, then, is essential. Yet in learning scripture by heart the point is made for us. We need not initiate the emptying! What we quickly discover is that we don't know the passage nearly as well as we thought. As we begin committing its words to memory, repeating them over and over to get them correct,\(^{51}\) we find ourselves accepting, appreciating, enjoying, even being energized by

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\(^{51}\) Thomas E. Boomershine, speaking from a biblical storytelling perspective, advises against this level of precision. He writes: "...a preoccupation with getting every word of an English translation exactly right is probably inappropriate" (Story Journey, 30). No doubt he is correct with regard to
the very newness of what we are hearing.

The practice of emptying ourselves before the Word—or, as I suggest, of being emptied through the exercise of learning the Word by heart—also gives the preacher a much-needed opportunity to pay attention. Rather than running after preaching points, he focuses on being vigilant, watchful, and attentive. So much in the text is new! An attitude of eager receiving, one which anticipates freshness and surprise, replaces an obsession with knowing what a scripture "means." This same sense of discovery and surprise animates and informs preaching. Congregations are quick to notice their pastor's delight in finding new life in ancient texts.

There is a further dimension of attentiveness when the preacher learns scripture by heart. Just as "Scripture happens in the reading of scripture," so it happens in its hearing, particularly in hearing words spoken in one's own voice. The preacher learns to

lengthy scriptures, let alone entire Gospels. My practice, however, is to try to get the words of my brief passage (generally 200-300 words, lasting two to three minutes when performed) exactly right. Not only does this commitment to accuracy give me a boost of confidence for Sunday morning's performance—and give my parishioners the confidence that I am following a reliable translation's words (NRSV) and not improvising with my own—but it is also a way of respecting the text and humbling myself before it. The task of learning a passage word-for-word reinforces my need to empty myself of any thought that I "know" it, any notion that I don't need to rely upon God to speak to me before I can begin to speak to the congregation.

52 Esther de Waal, Esther, "Attentiveness." Weavings 17, no. 4 (2002), 26. Anna Carter Florence, in her book Preaching as Testimony (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 139-143, suggests fourteen different exercises for attending, including memorizing the scripture text for preaching. For Florence, memorization is solely for the benefit of the preacher's preparation, not for the added purpose of public performance. I would argue that the performance element adds seriousness and discipline to the practice, therefore increased attentiveness.

53 A valuable lesson of inductive preaching is the helpfulness of the preacher's sharing in the sermon what he or she has discovered in the study--animation as well as insight. Fred Craddock writes: "Why not the same inductive process in delivery as in preparation rather than a broken path of private induction and public deduction?" See As One Without Authority (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 100.

listen for how the sound of his voice surprises, how nuances of tone and inflection challenge a common interpretation of a text. ("Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor..." Is Zacchaeus repenting or bargaining? Is he being humble or assertive?) Just as emptying is a posture of humility before scripture, so attending is an attitude of expectation. As Dow Edgerton wisely suggests, "Listen to your own speaking, then, to hear what it tells you."  

**Embodying and Imagining**

The same can be said of our body. As Richard Ward writes:

The disciplines of oral reading, recitation, and retelling stories from scripture will help to train the voice and body to "see" the text with new eyes and hear it with new ears. They can also teach our voices and bodies to "think" in ways that will enable our own sermons to come alive in the hearing and imaginations of our listeners.  

That our bodies inform our exegesis—that they are an invaluable tool for the interpretation of scripture and an essential way we connect not only to our congregations but to our own selves, our innermost thoughts and emotions—is a truth that cannot be overstated. It is also a profoundly Christian view of scripture performance and preaching. Stephen Webb states why *embodiment* is central to Christian faith and ministry: "...when we read words that have been designated by God as God's Word to us, we can speak those words with our whole body, knowing that God too spoke in a body like ours."  

An obvious advantage of learning scripture by heart is the freedom it gives us for engagement: our eyes and face, our hands and arms, our legs, our unguarded selves are

55 Ibid., 160.


available to the congregation. None of it is possible when holding a Bible. Even the best lectors are inhibited by the Book—an odd and unfortunate paradox yet a common one in our churches. 58 That the scriptures are read from behind a lectern or pulpit further obscures the person whose physical presence is itself a witness to the truth, grace, and power of the church's sacred text. Embodying that which we proclaim, both in scripture and sermon, is of inestimable significance. Indeed, God too spoke in a body like ours. 59

Yet the issue is equally as important in the study as it is in the sanctuary. Learning a passage of scripture by heart—gradually freeing ourselves from the printed page, taking the text inside ourselves, giving it our own voice—provides an opportunity for surprise, insight, and discovery. We catch ourselves becoming the poor widow: we put our own copper coins into the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4)—first one, then the other. We see Jesus seated, observing the scene from across the way. He takes note of the crowd, he notices the rich people. Is he also the only one paying attention to the widow? From that distance how did he know what she had given? He must have heard her put both coins in! Could he tell by the sound that she had contributed "everything she had, all she had to live on"? Freed from the printed page, letting our bodies inform our minds, our journey of sermon preparation becomes an adventure of discovery. Performance Studies

58 The neutralizing of the human body in the oral reading of scripture is even more pronounced in those churches where the scripture text is printed in the worship folder or projected onto a screen. In these instances, worshippers do not look at the person reading; they look down at their bulletins or up at the screen. Since as a rule the eye trumps the ear, in churches that encourage reading the lector becomes invisible—a disembodied voice.

59 For preachers who use a pulpit—including myself (the architecture and design of the sanctuary at First Presbyterian Church makes it preferable; in the informal service in the church fellowship hall I do not use a pulpit)—embodifying what we proclaim is no less of an issue. Though only a part of us may be visible, engaging listeners with our eyes as well as with our facial expressions and gestures helps them to hear and follow. In one parishioner's words, "For some reason it's easier to understand when (the preacher is) looking at the congregation." See Appendix C.
pioneer, Ronald Pelias, commends to preachers the value of embodying the scriptures from which sermons come: “As performers take on others through their voices and bodies, they question and reflect upon what they hear and feel. Their voices suggest what sounds right. Their bodies tell them what seems valid.”  

And, we could add, what seems possible, for embodying leads to imagining. For preachers like myself, those whose seminary education was confined to books and seminars, the freedom to use one's imagination is like opening a magical wardrobe door: a whole new world appears. This is not to suggest that the tools of our academic training--lexicons and word studies, biblical commentaries, scholarly articles, classic works in ethics and theology, historical studies--should not be fully utilized. Rather it is to say that there is more to preachers than their minds; or, more precisely, it is to say that our minds are underutilized if they are constrained by a solely cognitive focus and not allowed to explore the intuitive and emotional sides of our being.  

Again, learning scripture by heart, internalizing the Word to us and to the church, removes constraints that limit connections to our body, our imagination, and, ultimately, our people. Hearing the Word of the Lord, we are changed. Our ears notice what our eyes miss. The mere act of standing up and saying out loud unthinkably bold words--the sound of our voice joined to an ancient penitent's voice: Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever! (Ps 44:23)--stirs us to the core. A preacher cannot help but wonder and imagine the individual's life, the community's life, out of which such a cry came. Can one's own preaching be unaffected after having spoken from

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60 Pelias, Performance Studies, 64.

61 The cognitive, intuitive, and emotive aspects of human consciousness are described in Frank A. Thomas, They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 8-10.
the heart words such as these?

**Dramatizing and Believing**

An attitude persists in the church that a proper oral reading of scripture is one in which all the words (including names of biblical people and places) are pronounced correctly, punctuation is properly observed, and mistakes are avoided through practice at home prior to Sunday. (Clergy are absolved from such judgments not only because they know how to pronounce the names, even those of the Hebrew prophets' children, but also because the congregation's judgment is reserved in its entirety for their sermons.) The thought of adding more than a hint of emotion to the reading, let alone offering an imaginative oral interpretation, is viewed with suspicion. Richard Ward, quoting a seminary student who resisted dramatizing her assigned passage, suggests that she conveys a widely shared opinion: "I don't want to be too dramatic in my reading because I want to maintain the theological integrity of the text."\(^{62}\)

As with the term *performance*, however, *dramatic* and *dramatizing* are not pejoratives.\(^{63}\) In defining the term, Ward demonstrates how dramatizing helps to convey a passage's integrity, even its purpose:

*Dramatic* is a viable term that describes how the text functions as effective and incarnational communication. Dramatic reading is not so named because it employs stylistic conventions appropriate to the theater. It is dramatic because it effects a transaction between the biblical text and its several auditors. In this transaction, the words printed on the page become an experience in literature, liturgy, and theology for readers and hearers. What the preacher (or some other public reader) aims for is not simply the oral transmission to the congregation of

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\(^{63}\) Ibid. See also the discussion in Chapter 2 above, "Learning from Performance Studies," 13-18. Charles Bartow would ask those seeking to avoid being "too dramatic" in their oral reading of scripture, "Who are we to wrest a pale, liturgical recital from the Bible's blood and guts?" (*Effective Speech Communication*, 88).
the words that appear on the page but a lively encounter through which a text (that which is written and read from a page) becomes a form of aesthetic communication (a creative act in time in which meanings are made). 64

Before a scripture passage can be effectively dramatized for a congregation, however--before it can become the creative act it promises to be--it needs to be experienced as a "lively encounter" by the preacher herself. Learning a text by heart allows the preacher to hear--again, in her own voice--exactly how the scripture is dramatic, how it is filled with human longing, hoping, rebelling, failing, needing, receiving, praising, and rejoicing. One need hardly be an actor to feel the emotion, the thrill of hopefulness, expressed by the Apostle as he writes to the saints in Thessalonica: "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess 4:17). Saying the verse out loud, repeating it in order to know it by heart, the preacher is struck by the power of the final phrase, and we will be with the Lord forever. No drama needs to be added! Yet the words are honored when honestly expressed with joyfulness in the promise of timeless and close communion with the Savior. As the preacher rehearses it, he feels it, intensely. 65 No need to look down at the page, this is a personal testimony--it is my testimony! Hardly a text about people "left behind" or an argument for pre- or post-millennialism, it is a word of encouragement for this-worldly hope. When the drama of such a verse is embraced and expressed, hope happens.

64 Ibid., 59-60. Emphasis is Ward’s.

65 Bruce E. Shields, noting the importance for preachers of reading God’s Word as a word to us, writes: "Most people find it easier to deal with a text objectively when reading it silently, but we discover that it is hard to keep the subjective self at bay when the words are pronounced and heard" (From the Housetops: Preaching in the Early Church and Today [St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000], 126).
And a sermon begins. Particularly for those whose preaching is more comfortable in the safe zone of the cognitive, personal testimony is vital. Edgerton writes:

It is not a speaking about, but the communication of. Not speaking about faith, hope, and love, but the communication of them....Preaching is a form of faith, hope, and love enacted and made real between speaker and hearers. Preaching is believing. 66

The promise and the delight of the practice of scripture by heart is the preacher’s continual rediscovery of his or her own belief. He hears good news for himself. She hears the promises of faith for herself. The discipline, one soon discovers, is not about memorization, but inspiration. The Spirit does come. We do believe what we preach. The scripture is true: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

66 Edgerton, Speak to Me, 102. Emphasis is Edgerton's.
CHAPTER 4

SCRIPTURE BY HEART: A MEANS OF GRACE, A GIFT TO THE CHURCH

A Means of Grace, Private and Public

We in pastoral ministry often lament how the demands of the vocation limit time for personal devotion and renewal. Our days are spent multi-tasking between meetings, emails, visits, staff concerns, counseling, teaching, planning, community involvement, and sermon preparation. Our parishioners need us, and as caring people we want to be available to them even when it means rearranging our schedule and lengthening our day to accommodate them. What gets neglected is us. We read the Bible for sermon study; we ought to take more time for devotional reading, we say, but we just don't have the time.

In the practice of scripture by heart, however, the gap between reading the Bible for private devotion and studying the Bible for an upcoming sermon is bridged. Devotional reading is a rich resource for faith, and worth every moment of our time. Yet learning scripture by heart for performance in worship is equally enriching, equally transforming. Not only is it a way of internalizing God's Word, it is a way of becoming open to God's Spirit.

"The 'means of grace,'" Howard Rice says, "are those practices by which the believer becomes receptive to God, attentive to what God may be demanding, and responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit." Even the times set aside during the week for rehearsing one's passage become opportunities for receptivity. Rice notes:

As we repeat the words over and over, our minds are channeled and shaped in the process. Repetition is a way of training our minds and becoming attentive. Our

minds are otherwise filled with distractions. The discipline of repetition is of more value to us in our busy world than it was for people of earlier centuries, who lived at a much slower pace. This is the value of memorization of scripture....We may discover that the familiarity thus bred is one that changes our behavior.\textsuperscript{68}

My own witness is that the scripture for the week speaks to me at important moments in my life and ministry. My thoughts and behaviors are challenged and changed, almost predictably, in those moments when they need to be changed. Inevitably I find myself amazed and edified, grateful for the gift of the scripture that is in my heart.\textsuperscript{69}

The practice is a gift to the congregation as well, a means whereby the people of the church are opened to the refreshments and challenges of God's Spirit. Charles Bartow writes:

\begin{quote}
The reading and hearing of the Scriptures is a means of grace. With the Bible's words God addresses us personally in Christ, establishes a point of contact between us and the divine self, breathes into our tired lungs the breath of a new life, and fashions a people of God.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

The contact is more than evident. What I see each Sunday is my parishioners' eyes. When I perform a biblical passage it is as though breathing has stopped. (I am often reminded of my own experience of David Rhoads's scripture performance during the first year of the Doctor of Ministry program.) The congregation's engagement is palpable. Rather than the scripture lesson being a forgettable part of the liturgy, it is a central part, an essential part—a means of grace for the church.

Survey responses from the congregation bear out this impression (Appendixes A,

\textsuperscript{68} ibid., 115-116.

\textsuperscript{69} In Appendix D I relate instances when the scripture by heart practice was a personal means of grace.

\textsuperscript{70} Bartow, \textit{Effective Speech Communication}, 87.
B, and C). From their perspective, the performance aspect of the preacher's scripture by heart practice is key. Its bearing on preaching—how they are more ready to listen, how they sense that the Spirit is moving—is significant.

I have grouped the congregation's responses into five categories: attentiveness (people are eager to listen to the scripture), comprehension (people grasp more easily what the scripture is about), connection with the sermon (the scripture lesson and sermon are joined in an organic way), engagement (the scripture speaks to people personally and meaningfully), and gratitude (people are grateful for the one performing the scripture). The final category is a surprising one. One worshipper's comment is instructive: "Reading is perhaps (a) performance, but knowing (the passage) by heart...creates the sense that the gospel is important enough to take time to memorize it. That means to me (that) I (had) better listen and apply this scripture." Not only is the preacher's time and effort appreciated, the performance is persuasive, bringing to mind for the hearers their own calling to perform the Word in their lives. Bartow's statement that the reading and hearing of the scriptures are a means of grace, that by them the church is fashioned into a people of God, underscores the potential of a scripture by heart practice for preachers.

**Scripture by Heart: A Practice, Not a Talent**

Describing the discipline as a practice is important, not only in the way the word suggests the value of repetition and rehearsal, but also in how, as a practice of faith, it has the capacity to shape believers and communities over time. Moreover, using the

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term "practice" to describe learning scripture by heart for performance in worship denotes who can do it and who can do it well. To say it is a practice is to offer it to all. Learning and performing scripture is not limited to a talented few. In fact, it has little to do with talent; rather, like other spiritual practices, it has to do with a willingness to devote the time to learning texts well enough to perform them in worship. Since this is a stumbling block for preachers already pressed for time, I would offer three points for consideration.

First, scripture passages for preaching are not lengthy. Texts included in the Revised Common Lectionary are usually between six and fourteen verses in length, or two to three hundred words. While the time required to memorize a passage is not insignificant--often taking two to three hours--when understood as part of one's sermon preparation it fits well within a preacher's schedule. Nor should memorization be viewed as a chore. While time consuming at first, it soon becomes enjoyable, even rewarding. What starts out as a no-way-can-I-do-this struggle becomes, after a relatively short while, an I-did-it! achievement.72

72 Richard Ward, Speaking of the Holy, 10, referencing his own church background, notes that while "Reciting the scripture from memory was a highly valued discipline," the practice has been scrutinized by many, even ridiculed. Among the negatives he mentions are the way it was forced upon young people and the fact that rote recitation often sounded "stilted, forced, and hurried... feature(ing) the speaker's command of the words of the text, but not much of its thought and meaning." Ward is justifiably critical of the way scripture memorization "was often a substitute for critical engagement with... texts and was not the same as deep knowledge of them." Despite these issues, Ward writes: "I was left with a memory of the Bible that is full of sound and movement and is interwoven with memories of my community." Ward today is a leading proponent of the oral study of scripture and an advocate of scripture by heart for preachers.

73 Strategies for memorization should be tailored to one's own needs and schedule. Ronald Pelias's approach for theater performers (Performance Studies, 84) is helpful for scripture by heart practitioners: 1)repeat the text, one part at a time, until you can get all the way through it; 2)tape-record the piece (I use the audio recording feature on my cell phone, playing verses back to check accuracy); and 3)carry a copy with you at all times (to aide in recollection as needed—I print out a NRSV copy from a Bible website [www.devotions.net/Bible/00Bible.htm]). I would add a fourth strategy: Stand when rehearsing the text and let yourself move. Not only do we tend to associate verses and phrases of a passage with physical movements and gestures, thereby facilitating memorization, we also discover nuances of meaning in our text through our bodies. Our physicality serves as an instructor in this way (see "Embodying and Imagining" above, 24-
Second, *beginning the week with learning one's preaching passage is a surprisingly stress-free activity, well suited to the day after preaching.* While it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that memorizing scripture is not stressful, if one sets aside ample time and has a quiet place to sit (and a hot cup of coffee), the experience is a relaxed and pleasurable one. Unlike other pastoral activities, this one has an immediate and obvious reward: a passage of scripture committed to memory. Additionally, as discussed above, time spent internalizing one's text is time for imaginative reflection and meditation, something which bears fruit for sermons.

Third, *rehearsing one's scripture text over the course of the week provides further opportunities for insight and discovery.* Twenty to thirty minutes of practice each day prior to Sunday is necessary for a performance that allows the text to speak for itself, a performance that seems effortless and natural, one whereby the congregation's attention may be focused entirely on the Word and not on the performer. Rehearsal, however, is not only about getting the words right. Time spent practicing is also time for experimentation, for trying out different possibilities for interpreting verses orally such as varying one's rate of delivery, pitch (or inflection), volume, pauses, phrasing, and emphasis.\(^74\) In rehearsal one's voice and body become, as Ronald Pelias teaches, analytic tools for discovering not only authentic and compelling ways to perform a text but

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27) I would add that in the two-and-a-half years I have followed this scripture by heart practice, I have learned that being patient with myself—especially when my mind goes blank and I can't recall what I'd memorized just five minutes before—is important. A gentle approach to memorization lowers anxiety and supports the graciousness of the opportunity to take God's Word into one's soul.

74 Clayton Schmit, *Public Reading of Scripture*, 85-96, describes at length each of these six dimensions of oral interpretation.
exegetical and hermeneutical insights into a text.\textsuperscript{75} Especially as the preacher becomes more familiar with a passage, \textit{playing} with it,\textsuperscript{76} experimenting with various interpretations, especially imaginative ones, works to open the mind and heart to what may be an even more grace-filled and compelling Word.

\textbf{Dealing with Performance Anxiety}

While preachers stand before congregations on a weekly basis, performing scripture from memory is a different experience. The possibility, unlikely as it may be, of losing one's place, of standing dazed and confused in front of a waiting crowd, is daunting. Who needs the added anxiety?

To suggest that performance anxiety--stage fright--is not an issue for one intending to perform scriptures, even a brief passage lasting two or three minutes, is disingenuous and unhelpful. What is critical for the preacher is to decide that what is gained through the discipline of learning scripture by heart is worth the time and effort. Once that commitment is made, the preacher soon discovers that the best antidote to stage fright is practice--daily rehearsal. Repetition is especially fruitful: time spent practicing one's verses is time spent cultivating the soil of one's mind and soul; it is time given to letting the Word find its depth. Moreover, the benefit of rehearsal is obvious on Sunday when the text is offered without hesitation or stumbling. Inevitably, performance anxiety, though always present to some degree, is no hindrance when one stands up on Sunday

\textsuperscript{75} Pelias, \textit{Performance Studies}, 64-86.

\textsuperscript{76} ibid., 65. Pelias notes that \textit{playing}--trying out intuitions, discovering new ideas, and releasing inhibitions--is an important step in learning a performance. For preachers, playing with a scripture text may reveal nuances of meaning that are implicit in the text itself. Such possibilities for interpretation and preaching may be researched later.
morning to give the Word to the church.\textsuperscript{77}

Yet more needs to be said. Fear, after all, is not inappropriate when one considers what is being proclaimed. Stephen Webb, in a fascinating chapter titled, "Stage Fright at the Origins of Christian Proclamation," testifies that this most unwelcome occurrence is also "the occasion for a profound experience of faith in God….Stage fright is, in a very real sense, the way in which the Christian body processes the dynamic of faith and doubt."\textsuperscript{78}

More than the possibility of embarrassment, the anxiety that accompanies a performance of scripture in worship reminds preachers of the Word's power—its power in our lives, its power in the congregation's life. Rather than inhibiting the performer it frees her to boldly express the truth in love. As the fear of God deepens and enriches faith, so, by grace, it causes a preacher to want to do his best. Performing scripture before a congregation then becomes a privilege of the highest order.

We know this because we see it on Sunday. When we share God's Word from the heart, we see the saints listening. They are waiting to hear, waiting to believe.

\textsuperscript{77} I follow David Rhoads's recommendation to always have a copy of the text on a music stand or pulpit in case I lose my place. In the few years I have performed scripture by heart I have had to briefly return to the printed text perhaps a half dozen times. Each time, once prompted, I have been able to continue without it. Nor does the congregation seem to mind. Grateful for my commitment, they are forgiving of my lapses of memory.

\textsuperscript{78} Stephen Webb, The Divine Voice, 80. Similarly, Thomas Boomershine (Story Journey, 191-192), observes that the ending of the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel where the women abruptly flee from the empty tomb, "for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8), is a connecting point for believers for whom "telling the (gospel) story is an awesome and fearsome task—a task which, Boomershine offers, "...is the calling of every follower of Jesus in daily life" (194).
CHAPTER 5

SCRIPTURE BY HEART, PREACHING BY HEART

It was the question I hoped no one would ask. Halfway through the second year of the D.Min. program a member of my Parish Project Group wondered aloud, "Might you spend a little less time memorizing your scripture and a little more time learning your sermon?"

Of course! Anyone watching a DVD recording of the scripture performance followed by my preaching would ask the same thing. With the scripture my eyes were up, focused on the congregation. I was animated and free. With the sermon my eyes were up and down, and too often down when they should have been up. I was less animated and less free. My body and my being, it seemed, were tethered to the manuscript. My words—the written ones—mattered too much; I was attached to them. The irony was obvious: my scripture by heart practice was showing up my preaching.

I had not thought of this beforehand. My intention had simply been to share the experience and excitement of hearing the Word as it was originally heard—spoken, not read. It had not occurred to me that my scripture by heart practice would challenge the way I preached. No doubt the PPG member spoke for many in the congregation, and as usual I was the last to get what everyone else got. Was it possible to change after three decades of writing and word-smithing? I had learned to internalize scripture. Could I do the same with the sermon? What would it accomplish? And why did it matter to me and to the congregation?
Connection or Comfort? A Preacher's Choice

At some point every preacher struggles with the question. It is a hard question, a highly personal one. Is manuscript-free, even note-free preaching possible for me? We know others can do it and we can probably do it. But can we do it well? Can we do it well every Sunday? Ministry is hard enough; preaching is hard enough. Is the anxiety of standing before the congregation without security—without notes and therefore without protection from stumbling, panicking, and forgetting—worth the trouble? Charles Koller's answer does not surprise:

A survey of homiletical literature reveals, along with an endless variety of views and methods, that there is fairly general agreement on two points: First, it is recognized that most congregations prefer note-free preaching. Secondly, it is agreed that each minister must find for himself (sic) the particular method that will best enable him to achieve such freedom from notes in the pulpit.\textsuperscript{79}

If Koller's first point is what we expect to hear, his second point is what we need to hear. As preachers, we have to find our own way. Homiletics professors, clergy colleagues and congregants can make suggestions for improvement, they can encourage and challenge us, but we must make the decision to let go of the old and embrace the new.

Once the decision is made resources are available.\textsuperscript{80} Yet a scripture by heart practice is a surprisingly good place to start. What the preacher quickly discovers is the

\textsuperscript{79} Charles W. Koller, \textit{How to Preach Without Notes} (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1962), 34. While some suggest that practice is the key to using a manuscript well, Koller argues that "sermons effectively read are so extremely rare that this procedure may be practically ruled out except for the most extraordinary circumstances." He continues, "And while reading has been more or less acceptable in certain quarters, it has never been popular with the average audience."

\textsuperscript{80} A review of Koller's \textit{How to Preach Without Notes} is helpful even if one has had a no-notes practice. His list of resources, particularly in the endnotes for Chapter 4, "The Advantages of Preaching Without Notes" (137-138), is useful.
power of connection it affords. We see what we have been missing, literally. With the text internalized, we see the congregation. We engage their eyes, we hold their attention. Indeed, the worshipper's comment, "For some reason it's easier to understand when (the preacher is) looking at the congregation," proves the reliance of the ear upon the eye. Yet the converse is also true for preachers. When we have heard a scripture deeply we are able to look deeply at our parishioners.

What I began to notice, and have continued to notice, was the newness of the experience. I felt as though I were starting my preaching ministry all over again. So accustomed to looking down at my passage, all the while aware of the need to look up for eye contact, I never imagined such a personal encounter with people might be possible. After beginning the scripture by heart practice, though, not only did I realize it was possible, I realized it was welcomed. My initial experience of hearing scripture performed was being replicated for my parishioners and they were as enthusiastic as I had been. While I still needed nudges to let go of the manuscript, the transition was less difficult than I feared--in fact, it was not difficult at all. The choice to connect with people, to let go of getting every word right, was a choice to be more authentic, unguarded, and present with the congregation. While the words of the sermon had always been my own, nevertheless with the manuscript in the way they could just as well have been someone else's. Removing the manuscript, like performing the scripture, removed a

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81 Koller, 38, quoting John N. Booth, The Quest for Preaching Power (New York: Macmillan Co., 1943), 222, confirms this observation: "Psychologists, conducting tests under laboratory conditions, have found that people remember that which is read to them, with forty-nine percent efficiency. Retention increases to sixty-seven percent when the thought is expressed, not by reading, but by direct address." Though the study is dated, it is likely that its results today, given people's short attention spans, would be even more weighted to the thought expressed side of the equation.
barrier. Now, suddenly, finally, it was just us. And the us--more than ever before--
included God.

**Faith and Risk: A Preacher's Calling**

Perhaps it comes back to stage fright. If what Stephen Webb says is true, that
stage fright in preaching is not merely about nerves but about an "occasion for a profound
experience of faith in God," then there is great value for preachers in addressing our
fear. What insecurity in us lies in the way of preaching that moves, shapes, and
transforms? More importantly, must we be completely confident in our preaching--or for
that matter in our faith--before we are willing to speak without notes, or *is the decision to
speak an unguarded word the beginning of the transformation of our preaching and our
faith?* It is an important question, particularly for those of us who have spent years with
manuscripts, needing to see what we have to say. Yet what stage fright teaches is that if
we wait to be sure of ourselves, we will wait too long, and we will never be sure. As
Webb suggests, "Believing is not seeing--and not just hearing, either--but speaking."83

What we preachers forget is that our parishioners look to us not only for insight
and inspiration, but also for witness. They know our voice; they hear more than we say.
They know when our words are personal, when what we are expressing is tender and real.
They listen for authenticity, for biblical truth spoken in their preacher's voice. They look
to us to speak about faith, our faith, in order to help them speak about theirs. Out of the
safety of the sanctuary they too are unguarded, they too feel vulnerable. If our goal is to
equip people to share the love of Christ in a distracted and disbelieving world, then we do

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83 Ibid., 84.
well to show what it means in our own preaching to take risks, to feel exposed, to trust
the truth inside us. It is the Word of grace and truth that our people are waiting to hear. It
is the good news in our words, in our voice that they seek. If our aim is to encourage the
congregation to face the performance anxiety inherent in Christian living today,
especially the need for believers to use their voices to speak up on matters of faith and
justice, then we do well to accept the risks inherent in bold and winsome proclamation.
Beginning a practice of learning scripture by heart for performance in Sunday worship,
starting a discipline of taking the Word deep within, may provide the grace and courage
we need. It may be just the witness and encouragement our parishioners need in their own
performance of the Word.

Saltiness

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be
restored?" Jesus' question is for preachers and congregations alike, but preachers hear it
first. For us Monday morning is restore-the-salt time. But how will the restoration
happen? When will the excitement come, that moment when we sense that what we have
to say, what we want to say, matters to the church and the world? This much we know:
We are salt! We are Christ's! He has given us our identity and our life; he will give us
what we need. In him blessings come first, then commands.84 Our calling is itself a
blessing: to penetrate his people with purpose and peace. The church's calling is to

84 Frederick Dale Bruner, Matthew: A Commentary, Vol. 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12 (Grand
penetrate the earth with justice and love.\textsuperscript{85} For the church, Sunday morning is restore-the-salt time. It begins with us; it begins with the Word.

Monday morning. We open to our text and read it aloud. We make note of stanzas, sets of verses surrounding thoughts and images. We repeat words and phrases, letting them penetrate our minds and souls. Some are difficult to get right. We do not become discouraged. It takes time, time to get the feel of the words, the way they sound in a sentence. Soon enough we get it. How suddenly it happens! Thoughts come; recent experiences and deeply-stored memories enter our consciousness. We jot them down. Will they help bring our sermon to life? Emotions arrive like unexpected guests: sadness, joy, wonder. Why? What is it about taking these words inside that causes so much in us to be noticed, pondered, released, and felt? How is it that our ears respond to our voice? How will God use our voice so that others may hear?

\textit{Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.}

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 189. Bruner's insight into Matt 5:13 is itself penetrating.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Articles


APPENDIX A
SURVEY RESULTS
From August 29, 2010 Congregational Survey
154 surveys completed
(total from 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. services)

Which worship service did you attend today?
9:00  90
10:30 160
Questionnaire responses: 51/103

Question #1: How meaningful or helpful to you was the service today?

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<td>not very meaningful</td>
<td>very meaningful</td>
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9:00 a.m. rating:  
1  0%
2  0%
3  7%
4  31%
5  61%

10:30 a.m. rating:  
1  0%
2  3%
3  12%
4  25%
5  61%

Question #2: Did the way the scripture lesson was presented/performd affect your experience of the scripture (your hearing, understanding, and/or personal response)?

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<td>not very much</td>
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9:00 a.m. rating  
1  0%
2  0%
3  6%
4  35%
5  59%

10:30 a.m. rating  
1  0%
2  1%
3  5%
4  30%
5  64%

Question #3: Did the way the scripture lesson was presented affect your experience of the sermon (your hearing, understanding, and/or personal response)?

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9:00 a.m. rating  
1  0%
2  0%
3  7%
4  37%
5  55%

10:30 a.m. rating  
1  0%
2  1%
3  8%
4  30%
5  62%
APPENDIX B
SURVEY COMMENTS

Written responses received after the 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. services on Sunday, August 29, 2010 in response to the question: How does the giving of the scripture “by heart” affect your experience of the sermon?

Note: every written comment submitted is included here, including comments on the sermon preached the Sunday of the survey.

9:00 a.m. comments

It enhances the experience of the scripture listening to it. I wouldn’t mind having the words to read as well--on screen or in Bible--but I wouldn’t be looking to see if you made a mistake--just to see it in print as well as hear it.

It is a very powerful way to share the scripture--it’s great (very few people like to be read to).

It pulls me into the experience and makes us all one--pastor and congregants. I hear and experience it differently and it causes me to become more involved in the sermon that follows.

I feel challenged to open my heart and spend time with those that I don’t feel things in common with. The scripture jumped out at me even with all our study of it! Thanks, Peter.

Peter is always good but he has gotten better.

I feel the memorization of the scripture shows the passion, time, care, and thoughtfulness put into the choice of verse. This is a good thing and I appreciate the effort put into this.

It feels like a conversation or a story that means something to Peter and brings excitement and connection with what Peter/God has to say to my heart. I also like Old and New Testament that work with sermon.

I pay much more attention when given by heart.

It makes the scripture and the sermon one fluid, more connected, one event as opposed to two separate things.

It feels current, alive and personal. Thanks, Peter!

It brings it to LIFE, the Bible that is.
In a practical sense it allows me to focus on the message instead of having my mind wonder to which text is being used or whether the words will flow fluidly on a deeper level it makes the message clearer, more timely (perhaps timeless?) and more relevant.

One realizes the effort--preparation that has gone into the sermon--real involvement.

Strongly! And wonderfully so--it’s powerful and makes Scripture alive and personal.

It is easier to see the events in today’s terms, and then the “lesson” as applicable to my life.

Doubles it.

I realized we can give in so many ways--it is the spirit of the heart in giving that determines the quality of our hospitality. Giving of ourselves is showing the work of Christ in our life.

It appears Peter really attempts to put together a meaningful sermon by making it personally important to him i.e., in his sermon/preaching he is preaching with us not to us. Now substance is most important, the form takes care of itself.

Love it!! It means so much more to me if it means that much to you if you memorize it.

It feels like a “new story” is being told specifically to me.

A Blessing

I liked it!

Really helps me connect with the scripture without the distraction of reading--very meaningful.

I think Peter’s memorization of the scripture is very positive. Also his singing shows his humility and purity. He might think of including more modern-day “helpless” people in the sermon--not just blind, lame, etc.--like the homeless, widowed, divorced, single parents, etc.

I think it helps connect the message to each individual.

I think I tend to listen more carefully. The Scripture is being spoken to us instead of read. It’s more engaging since Peter isn’t simply reading. My only concern is that I don’t want any “performance” and I don’t want the pastor to feel like we need him to “perform” or feel like he’s less if he doesn’t memorize the scripture.

It is impressive, but nor more meaningful. The background information times, places, sociology of that society is very meaningful--prior to the scripture reading.
I remembered the sermon this week--but not the Scripture.

The Scripture when delivered by memory seems better explained to me so that the tie to the sermon is much clearer.

It’s nice. It’s more sincere--not as scripted.

I feel a real connection with pastor peter as he delivers the reading and sermon.

Great with thoughtful set up of scripture before--the narrative comes alive.

Giving the scripture by heart brings life to the words, allows them to sink in better. I love how he is bringing in more personal experiences into his sermons.

It makes me listen more closely.

It makes the scripture feel more personal.

It makes the experience much more genuine and powerful.

I feel much more attuned to what the pastor will say about the sermon--if he can memorize the least I can do is pay real attention. The memorization demands attention!

Firstly, committing God’s words to heart enhances not only the speaker but as a listener, I felt like it was personally speaking to me (which it was). It makes the hearer have to be more attentive… I’m not an auditory learner but I do love hearing God’s word spoken from deep w/in a heart. Thank You.

Makes all the difference--very positive.

Peter does a wonderful job communicating and relating the Bible to real life. I also like how the children’s sermon is linked in too.

Reading of the scripture by heart has had a profound impact on how I experience the sermon. It eliminates a barrier between the pastor and the congregation; it pulls us in together so that we are all part of a group sharing an experience as opposed to being lectured to or even at. We are in the same place at the same time and on the same level. I find it much more satisfying and enlightening than the more traditional reading.
10:30 a.m. comments

To me, when Rev. Buehler gives the scripture from memory it is as if Jesus is speaking. I listen and think of the meaning, so that this is both a learning experience and a deeply moving faith experience.

This ‘by heart’ has become very important to me because I HEAR the meaning more to my heart and mind. I don’t exactly know why -- it affects but it does. Looking at Peter as he speaks ‘by heart’ is moving in itself. Thanks for doing this I guess I listen more intently to the sermon and hear the meaning of the verse.

A well memorized scripture allows for it to be spoken conversationally, and the scripture comes alive; this intensifies my interest and comprehension, as well as my retention of the details of the scripture to mentally refer back to during the sermon.

It has been very helpful to me, particularly because you put so much feeling into it. It must take so many hours to memorize, don’t know how you’ve found time, but it has been appreciated. Thank you.

Extremely positive. Adds a new level of understanding.

It is riveting! An oral tradition brought to life enhancing meaning and understanding. It brings the scriptures to life providing a good focus and lead-in to the sermon. I like it!

Very much! It makes it considerably more personal and meaningful.

Tremendously! Today’s sermon was probably the best I’ve ever heard. It should be printed somewhere and copies made available!

Excellent presentation

I actually follow the New Testament Lesson in the Bible as the pastor gives it by memory. I especially enjoyed the “new” delivery by our pastor and his fine singing voice. Very effective.

Peter’s delivery of scripture stirs me. All without notes: Today on humility; he is Humility (smiley face). Living it and breathing it. He has drawn us here. I feel the Spirit in his teachings.

I feel the words of Jesus/prophets speaking directly to me. It’s as if they were at the podium. The introduction provides valuable insight and understanding to fuel there impact the meaning of the Scripture.

Seems current and more personal.
Saying the Scripture by heart frees the speaker from reading. You can emphasize the meaning much better. I appreciate the extra effort to memorize the text.

The flow of the words and meaning of the scripture seem to progress very meaningfully into the sermon and there is no separation from one (scripture) into the sermon. There is more continuity and certainly it causes one to listen more carefully to the words and context.

I find it very effective in that I can relate to the passage more on a personal level. It seems more conversational but still reverent and with respect in the sacredness of the scripture. I truly appreciate all of the effort and time to prepare this delivery.

The content is very dramatically conveyed, improving communication, retention and interest. The contents give the impression that they are the thoughts of the deliverer and give an impression of sincerity. The scripture is often the highlight of the worship experience, in a way rarely conveyed even by capable readers.

Makes it more alive (real) and has more heart.

Can really focus on the entire sermon. Very meaningful.

Peter shows a great depth of understanding of the words he speaks and is able to make these words come to life for the congregation. I look forward to his delivery of the sermon every Sunday.

I can hear and feel Peter understands and love of that scripture when he says it from memory.

Makes me listen! It’s easier to connect to the heart of the sermon because I was not mindlessly following words on a page but absorbing the meaning. (I can close my eyes to shut out other distractions.)

I find it very meaningful and add to the scripture. Seems the message is really coming from the heart. My memory is not good but I appreciate the words that were spoken so even if I don’t retain the details, I get a lot from hearing them.

Gives confidence that extra attention to time on the scripture must enable you to bring out deepest and richest meaning of it.

I experience God and His Will, His Bread of Heaven for me, as Pastor Peter has feasted and then shares the feast w/us. Thank You. You modeled “table fellowship”, “spiritual table fellowship” with us today. And God says, “Well done, My servant Peter, for you have been faithful with little, and now I give you much.”

I was told that you attended school for sermonizing and there you learned to memorize the scripture for the sermon. I do not have my eyes open so I do not notice this ability.
But I do hear whether the minister seems sincere and understands the meaning of the verses. This morning especially I felt your heartfelnness and sincerity and humanness in the scripture and in the sermon. You touched my heart, which is my measure of any spiritual teaching.

The memorization leads us to a much better understanding of the message to come.

Very much. Better than being read!!!

I enjoy the personalization of Receiving the scripture as memorized and not just read. I respect the effort in memorization--it imparts a seriousness in its presentation.

I’m not certain of the rationale of presenting the scripture “by heart.” But I’m impressed that pastor presents the reading “by heart.”

As one who memorized Scripture in the Navigators system over 50 years ago I still find it a blessing. I appreciate the effort it takes and I do think we all get something special.

Helps the ‘hearing’ of the Word of God. Helps a ‘Heart/Spirit’ approach. Makes me more receptive to the Word preached. Brings me into it.

I don’t think it affects the sermon either way for me. If the pastor has memorized the Scripture, it’s impressive, but because I’m following along in my own Bible, it doesn’t matter to me if the pastor is as well.

Focuses attention on the scripture; always a bit worried that the memorization will fail--but Peter pulls it off; gets the terrible intro veering mode; listening.

Much more impressive than if read. More moving feel therefore there is a sincerity I feel and appreciate!

I personally like to hear the sermon given rather than read. It gives me a feeling that the minister has a real understanding for it and in turn is more meaningful to me.

It gives it validity--a generational thing--passing on the Word.

Not sure, I came late but I liked what I did hear. Thank you.

It breathes life into the sermon. It opens the door to the sermon’s purpose and ideas. It creates coherence in this part of the worship experience.

It makes it easier to understand the core meaning/intent of the scripture message.

Gives it more impact.

Total new experience of the Word making it more of a spoken tradition.
The Scripture is much more meaningful to me; it causes me to listen to the meaning and lesson if it is teaching to me. The Scripture by heart is a wonderful way to direct you to toward the entire Sermon. Thank you for memorizing all the Scripture you present to the congregation.

I’m not distracted by looking at notes. Loved it.

There is a depth of knowledge and familiarity with the text that enhances not only one’s understanding of the passage but, the physical understanding and transmission of the message because Peter is fully engaged in sending that information out to the congregation. What a blessing it is!

Doing the scripture by heart engages me to them also listen to the sermon.

Greatly increases its meaningfulness. I need more information of what “by heart” means. (Rev.) Buehler always puts his heart into giving of the scriptures.

It was presented with meaning and spontaneity. It came from his mouth to the hearts and minds of the congregation. Ending with the song was a blessing to all.

That our pastor has Committed the scripture “by heart” means to me that he is dedicated--has understood it better and can convey its meaning better to us.

Today’s sermon was the best! Clear and challenging!

I pay much attention to the scriptures and especially the introduction of the morning lesson. Today’s singing of the appropriate lira “Gifts of wheat” touched deep within my spirit, because the tears flowed freely.

Always enjoy the sermons.

Makes it become more alive – especially when I follow along in the Bible.

Ethel does her best and enjoys coming to church. She is not able to understand everything. I am sure you understand.

The meaning is more forceful when heard informally.

Wonderful sermon on hospitality and humility--humility is a difficult subject, and the sermon gave excellent examples of humility and the reasons why hospitality is needed in a congregation--good job. P.S. Taming of the ego is not easy!

Not at all.
It makes it more meaningful and the explanation prior to hearing the scripture is a great help. Having read the scripture before the worship time, it seemed very difficult to be made meaningful, but it was presented well.

I prefer not singing parts of the Bible readings.

To me it makes it more meaningful. For some reason it’s easier to understand when you are looking at the congregation. At the same time--like hearing poetry read aloud instead of reading silently.

“Amazing.” I understand and pay attention to the scriptures in this format.

I really like hearing you giving the scripture by heart as it’s like you are telling it to me, and I’m more apt to listen carefully, throughout the sermon. It is exceptionally helpful!

Most sermons seem too long--too much repetition.

Definitely enriches my experience of entire worship service. I cherish these sermons!

The sermon calls for a personal response to extend hospitality to those who cannot repay.

Very good.

Reading is perhaps performance but knowing by heart (memory) creates the sense that the gospel is important enough to take time to memorize it--that means to me I better listen and apply this scripture.

I appreciate learning the Scripture “by heart”--seems more relevant to sermon--and to life experience.

It has been “processed” by the reader; it’s more lively.

Good feeling--more meaningful.

It works very well--captures and keeps our attention so we really hear the messages. Today’s sermon topic was especially helpful to me. The concluding song was quite unexpected and touching. Thank you!

Admiration for “by heart” personification. To answer the question: “not much.”

Helps me comprehend the message more clearly.

It adds a dimension of honesty and wonderment. I feel it personalizes the scripture and sermon.
Very spiritual for Pastor. I admire the effort and his commitment. Yet I feel he focuses energy on the memorization apart from the message.

I appreciate is because it makes the message more meaningful and inspires me to learn more of the scriptures.

More relevant—expression.

I feel it is most meaningful. It seems to come through so very much. And is very dear and often really makes me think about it.

Very effective!

By heart seems to make it more meaningful to you personally which adds more meaning for us the audience.

Memorization would seem to truly convey meaning and be sincerely “by heart” and “from the heart.” It gives full meaning because it requires how the parts flow together for the fullest meaning of the passage.

I enjoy it but do think it is a crucial part to the sermon itself.

Peter’s memorization of the scripture, use of song and relevant and personal examples of scripture message help to make the sermon and service so meaningful for me. The message is always presented in a “heart felt” way that I can easily see how I can apply the message to my own life.

Your sermons must take a lot of time to memorize but they are wonderful.

Very meaningful!

It was an excellent sermon—very relevant in our society—easy to follow and meaningful.
Additional Comments from Follow-Up Interviews
With Parish Project Group Members
(Parish Project Group consists of congregation members
working in partnership with me during the D.Min. Program)

"When Pastor Peter introduces his sermon, his memorized presentation of the scripture is in the nature of telling a story around a close-knit fellowship of believers, as if it were around a campfire with the disciples or a group of followers, putting into context that which they do not know and setting the stage for the talk to the faithful. I always listen carefully and feel the connection between speaker (or narrator) and the listeners. It is an intimate and thoughtful time."

"We are and have been impressed and moved by the giving of the memorized scriptures. As with any delivery, the less one relies on notes and reading the more the audience can relate to the person and the message."

"As with an actor, speaking the part vs. reading makes it more relatable. This way, (I) don't think about what version of the Bible is being used. Readers often stumble on words and break the concentration and the passage loses something. I'm more engaged and open to hearing the sermon--more connected. (I) feel like you are too...that it's a two-way street."

"When Peter memorizes the scripture, I'm able to concentrate more on the sermon. I'm looking for things from the scripture. I pay much more attention when given by heart."

"The scripture 'flows' into the sermon. (I) feel it's more natural and heartfelt rather than created. For (me), reading is not as sincere."

"(My) personal philosophy as a teacher is to talk or tell rather than read. Students learn better (when) they are more personally connected. (I feel) this is the same with you. (I) now listen with different ears. Now scripture and sermon are more connected--not separate."

"It appears Peter has a deeper understanding of the scripture when recited from memory...the meaning jumps out in the delivery...I also like to read other version of the scripture even Spanish to see the interpretation."

"I feel more connected to the sermon...It elevates my awareness...I have better recall when I go home..."

"I feel like Peter is teaching me the lesson...I can internalize better...It feels like the sermon is brought to life."
APPENDIX C
SURVEY COMMENTS CATEGORIZED

Written responses received after the 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. services on August 29, 2010 in response to the question: How does the giving of the scripture “by heart” affect your experience of the sermon? (Certain respondents' survey comments [listed Appendix B] that did not pertain to the question have been omitted. The negative comments in Appendix B have also been omitted.)

Survey responses are categorized to indicate that the performance of the sermon scripture by heart had an effect on worshippers:

**Attentiveness**  People were eager to listen to the scripture

**Comprehension**  People could grasp more easily what the scripture was about

**Connection**  Scripture lesson and sermon connected in a natural/organic way

**Engagement**  The scripture spoke to people personally and meaningfully

**Gratitude**  Knowing that the preacher had spent significant time memorizing the scripture text, worshippers listened appreciatively and carefully; they had greater confidence in the preacher’s message.

**Attentiveness** – people are eager to listen to the scripture

*I pay much more attention when given by heart.*

*Really helps me connect with the scripture without the distraction of reading – Very meaningful.*

*I think I tend to listen more carefully. The Scripture is being spoken to us instead of read. It’s more engaging since Peter isn’t simply reading.*

*It makes me listen more closely.*

*Makes it more alive (real) and has more heart.*

*Makes me listen! It’s easier to connect to the heart of the sermon because I was not mindlessly following words on a page but absorbing the meaning. (I can close my eyes to shut out other distractions.)*

*Helps the ‘hearing’ of the Word of God. Helps a “Heart/Spirit” approach. Makes me more receptive to the Word preached. Brings me into it.*

*Amazing. I understand and pay attention to the scriptures in this format.*

*Captures and keeps our attention so we really hear the messages.*
When Pastor Peter introduces his sermon, his memorized presentation of the scripture is in the nature of telling a story around a close-knit fellowship of believers, as if it were around a campfire with the disciples or a group of followers, putting into context that which they do not know and setting the stage for the talk to the faithful. I always listen carefully and feel the connection between speaker (or narrator) and the listeners. It is an intimate and thoughtful time.

Comprehension – people grasp more easily what the scripture is about.

The scripture jumped out at me even with all our study of it!

In a practical sense it allows me to focus on the message instead of having my mind wonder to which text is being used or whether the words will flow fluidly on a deeper level it makes the message clearer, more timely (perhaps timeless?) and more relevant.

The Scripture when delivered by memory seems better explained to me so that the tie to the sermon is much clearer.

Giving the scripture by heart brings life to the words, allows them to sink in better.

A well memorized scripture allows for it to be spoken conversationally, and the scripture comes alive; this intensifies my interest and comprehension, as well as my retention of the details of the scripture to mentally refer back to during the sermon.

The content is very dramatically conveyed, improving communication, retention and interest. The contents give the impression that they are the thoughts of the deliverer and give an impression of sincerity. The scripture is often the highlight of the worship experience, in a way rarely conveyed even by capable readers.

It makes it easier to understand the core meaning/intent of the scripture message.

There is a depth of knowledge and familiarity with the text that enhances not only one’s understanding of the passage but, the physical understanding and transmission of the message because Peter is fully engaged in sending that information out to the congregation. What a blessing it is!

To me it makes it more meaningful. For some reason it’s easier to understand when you are looking at the congregation. At the same time – (it’s) like hearing poetry read aloud instead of reading silently.

Helps me comprehend the message more clearly.
Memorization would seem to truly convey meaning and be sincerely “by heart” and “from the heart.” It gives full meaning because it requires how the parts flow together for the fullest meaning of the passage.

It appears Peter has a deeper understanding of the scripture when recited from memory...the meaning jumps out in the delivery...I also like to read other version of the scripture even Spanish to see the interpretation.

I feel like Peter is teaching me the lesson...I can internalize better...It feels like the sermon is brought to life.

Connection with sermon – scripture lesson and sermon are connected in a natural/organic way

It pulls me into the experience and makes us all one--pastor and congregants. I hear and experience it differently and it causes me to become more involved in the sermon that follows.

It makes the scripture and the sermon one fluid, more connected, one event as opposed to two separate things.

It is easier to see the events in today’s terms, and then the lesson is applicable to my life.

This “by heart” has become very important to me because I HEAR the meaning more to my heart and mind. I don’t exactly know why--it affects but it does. Looking at Peter as he speaks by heart is moving in itself. Thanks for doing this I guess I listen more intently to the sermon and hear the meaning of the verse.

The flow of the words and meaning of the scripture seem to progress very meaningfully into the sermon and there is no separation from one (scripture) into the sermon. There is more continuity and certainly it causes one to listen more carefully to the words and context.

It breathes life into the sermon. It opens the door to the sermon’s purpose and ideas. It creates coherence in this part of the worship experience.

(I’m) more engaged and open to hearing the sermon--more connected. (I) feel like you are too...that it’s a two-way street.

When Peter memorizes the scripture, I’m able to concentrate more on the sermon. I’m looking for things from the scripture. I pay much more attention when given by heart.
The scripture “flows” into the sermon. (I) feel it’s more natural and heartfelt rather than created. Reading is not as sincere.

(My) philosophy as a teacher is to talk or tell rather than read. Students learn better...they are more personally connected. ...(I) feel this is the same with you. (I) now listen with different ears. Now scripture and sermon are more connected—not separate.

I feel more connected to the sermon. It elevates my awareness. I have better recall when I go home.

**Engagement** – the scripture speaks to people personally and meaningfully

It feels like a conversation or a story that means something to Peter and brings excitement and connection with what Peter/God has to say to my heart.

It feels current, alive and personal.

It brings it to LIFE, the Bible that is.

Strongly! And wonderfully so--it’s powerful and makes Scripture alive and personal.

I think it helps connect the message to each individual.

I feel a real connection with Pastor Peter as he delivers the reading and sermon.

It makes the scripture feel more personal.

It makes the experience much more genuine and powerful.

Firstly, committing God’s words to heart enhances not only the speaker but as a listener, I felt like it was personally speaking to me (which it was). It makes the hearer have to be more attentive. I’m not an auditory learner but I do love hearing God’s word spoken from deep w/in a heart. Thank You.

To me, when Rev. Buehler gives the scripture from memory it is as if Jesus is speaking. I listen and think of the meaning, so that this is both a learning experience and a deeply moving faith experience.

It is riveting! An oral tradition brought to life enhancing meaning and understanding. It brings the scriptures to life providing a good focus and lead-in to the sermon. I like it!

It makes it considerably more personal and meaningful.
I feel the words of Jesus/prophets speaking directly to me. It's as if they were at the podium.

I find it very effective in that I can relate to the passage more on a personal level. It seems more conversational but still reverent and with respect in the sacredness of the scripture.

I really like hearing you giving the scripture by heart as it's like you are telling it to me, and I'm more apt to listen carefully, throughout the sermon. It is exceptionally helpful!

It adds a dimension of honesty and wonderment. I feel it personalizes the scripture and sermon.

I feel it is most meaningful. It seems to come through so very much. And is very dear and often really makes me think about it.

We are and have been impressed and moved by the giving of the memorized scriptures. As with any delivery, the less one relies on notes and reading the more the audience can relate to the person and the message.

Reading of the scripture by heart has had a profound impact on how I experience the sermon. It eliminates a barrier between the pastor and the congregation; it pulls us in together so that we are all part of a group sharing an experience as opposed to being lectured to or even at. We are in the same place at the same time and on the same level. I find it much more satisfying and enlightening than the more traditional reading.

Gratitude – knowing that the preacher has spent significant time memorizing the scripture text, worshippers listen appreciatively and carefully; they have confidence in the preacher’s message.

I feel the memorization of the scripture shows the passion, time, care, and thoughtfulness put into the choice of verse. This is a good thing and I appreciate the effort put into this.

One realizes the effort--preparation that has gone into the sermon--real involvement.

Love it!! It means so much more to me if it means that much to you if you memorize it.

It feels like a new story is being told specifically to me.
I feel much more attuned to what the pastor will say about the sermon—if he can memorize the least I can do is pay real attention. The memorization demands attention!

I truly appreciate all of the effort and time to prepare this delivery.

Gives confidence that extra attention to time on the scripture must enable you to bring out deepest and richest meaning of it.

I respect the effort in memorization—it imparts a seriousness in its presentation.

Much more impressive than if read. More moving feel therefore there is a sincerity I feel and appreciate!

That our pastor has committed the scripture “by heart” means to me that he is dedicated—has understood it better and can convey its meaning better to us.

Reading is perhaps performance but knowing by heart (memory) creates the sense that the gospel is important enough to take time to memorize it—that means to me I better listen and apply this scripture.
APPENDIX D
SCRIPTURE BY HEART AS A MEANS OF GRACE

The journal entries below reflect the personal impact of the week's scripture I'd learned by heart.

How Learning By Heart Changed My Heart

I came to the abbey once again to write my reflection paper following my third ACTS sermon. St. Andrew's Abbey is two hours due east of Santa Barbara, near Palmdale, in California's high desert. I love it here. It's very quiet, very spare, very conducive to concentration and reflection.

This time, however, I came with a burden. Last Sunday afternoon I'd lost my temper with my 25-year-old son, and I was depressed about it. He and I are extremely close; both of us wear our emotions on our sleeve. Something had set me off. He was emotionally down, and I "couldn't take it anymore." I shouted at him. After I'd quieted down, he asked me why I got so angry. He told me how hurtful it is to him when I "get like that." I felt myself sinking into a deep sadness. I was angry with myself and ashamed. I felt such deep remorse that I'd said things I couldn't take back and that I'd behaved in a way contrary to my own preaching from that same morning. I felt like a complete phony, a person with an uncontrollable temper; a scary person. Who am I? What good am I?

Two days later I arrived at the abbey, still feeling the weight of sadness and shame. After dinner on Tuesday evening I took a long walk up to the monks' cemetery on top of a nearby hill. It's a favorite place for me and a destination every time I come to visit. I love putting my hands on the huge granite obelisk. This time I used the walk to unleash my emotions--my regrets, my remorse, my sorrow, my guilt, my despair. How could I act this way toward the son I loved so much, the son I had always been there for, the son who has told me how much he loved me, how proud he was of me, what a great father I am more times than I could count? Yes, I was tired and worn out on Sunday, emotionally spent. But it seemed like a pitiful excuse. I was as low as I've ever been. I poured all this out, out loud. The desert sky seemed vast and silent. Was God listening? I felt God was listening. I had the sense God was not judging me. He hardly needed to do that.

From Wednesday morning until evening I focused on finishing my reflection paper. Then worship--the psalms, once again, were a comfort. Then dinner. I took my evening walk up to the cemetery. I was aware that I felt better, not so heavy, not so burdened. I thanked God for that, for what seemed like a healing of my heart. I reached the top of the hill and the obelisk. I put my hands on the granite and enjoyed the sensation. This will be here long after I'm gone, I thought. This is solid. The faith of the monks is solid. Christian faith is solid. My God is solid.
Following my discipline of memorizing the scripture on Monday for the following Sunday, and practicing during the week, I felt the desire to say my passage—Jonah 3:1-10—there at the top of the hill. The verses that struck me were those about the Ninevites' immediate, complete, and stunning repentance following Jonah's announcement, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Everyone repented, fasting and putting on sackcloth—even the king! Even the animals! And it was utterly sincere. Yes, they wanted to avoid destruction, but they also seemed to readily acknowledge, in the king's words, "their evil ways and the violence that is in their hands."

Walking back down the hill I was struck by how remorseful they must have felt, how completely they engaged themselves in repentance. And God saw it! Their repentance worked—not so much in persuading God of their sincerity and sorrow but in motivating them to change their ways. The text says that God changed his mind, but really the Ninevites' minds were the ones that had changed.

Suddenly, at the bottom of the hill, it hit me: I had been repenting! Tuesday night had been all about repentance. My experience was identical to the Ninevites! I'd repented of my own violence, my emotional and verbal violence toward my son. I'd been sincere, I'd been filled with remorse, I'd put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. What's more, that repentance, I realized, had been God's gift to me! All I'd been through had been for a good purpose—healing, restoration, change. Dealing with my moods and my anger towards my son could change only through repentance, and that was exactly the gift God had given me. He'd been listening all along. I smiled and laughed and gave thanks. I felt deeply happy. I was forgiven and accepted.

Jonah chapter 3 was not only my text but my story. Would I have experienced the insight and the grace I did had I not learned the passage by heart? I don't know. What I do know is that it was a transforming word to me and that it came at precisely the right time. I believe more deeply because the word is deep in me.

I have something to proclaim.
A Personal Encounter at the Treasury

The Tuesday before my sermon on Mark 12:38-44 was the day I had to lay off a church employee. I'd been dreading it. He was the Head Custodian at the church, a position he'd held for over twelve years. He was also for many a favorite staff member. Moreover, from the day we'd met he and I were close. He'd bring me a stack of cookies his wife had baked; I'd bring him helpings of my homemade meatloaf. He trusted and liked me. I enjoyed our many interactions and I depended on his practical help with my frequent maintenance and home repair issues.

Months before, however, the Human Resources Team of the session had raised issues. The Team and I wrestled with what to do. Several people were engaged to offer their assessment. Along with our Business Administrator, a fair and kind person whose judgment I trusted, we saw no alternative but to let him go. I determined that if anyone was going to tell him, it would be me. To have someone else do my dirty work would be cowardly and wrong. Still, I hated the thought of it. The unanimity of the HR Team and the size of the severance package did little to assuage my sadness and guilt. Would he be able to find another job? Would he and his wife be able to stay in Santa Barbara? Would he be bitter toward the church and toward me? I could think of little else. Compassion for this man alternated with bouts of self-pity: Did I go to seminary for this? Was I in ministry for this?

Our meeting did not go well. I was joined by an elder from the session, a fine and gentle man, but we had no way of softening the blow. He left my office in tears.

Unable to adequately explain the reason for his termination--personnel matters being fraught with potential legal peril and further human pain--other staff members questioned my integrity and fairness. While the special meeting I called clarified for them that he had done nothing wrong, that we loved him, that other factors were involved--that it was my decision to lay him off and not some faceless bureaucratic action--nevertheless sorrow and anger still filled the room. I felt more alone and more miserable.

Rehearsing the preaching text, following my weekly practice of memorization, I found myself struck again with the power of its final phrases, that the poor widow had "given everything she had, all she had to live on." This was what the passage was about. This was where a reader's soul-searching needed to focus. This was where scripture needed to intersect life. While considering this, it occurred to me that Jesus' focus was on the poor widow, that he saw what she was doing while no one else noticed. He noticed when she put her second copper coin in the treasury, he noticed that she'd held nothing back. In a moment of grace, I realized that Jesus saw me too. He knew that I'd done my best in a difficult situation. He knew that I loved this man. He knew I'd done what I believed was right. He knew how empty I felt. He knew that in this instance I'd put in my second coin, everything I had. He knew!

It made all the difference. I could hold my head up. His knowledge of me, something I felt in my soul, was an enormous comfort. As I realized how this text was
exegeting my life, emotion flooded over me. In the psalmist's words, joy came with the morning.

So also came the celebration for my sermon: Jesus knows! As I wrote my manuscript: *He is seated with a sight-line to our self-giving, a direct view to see us drop our second coin into the treasury.* It was my conviction, an assurance from my week's journey, that deep giving is a source of deep joy, that the risen Christ is the Giver of grace. True generosity, therefore, is profoundly positive. We give not because we *should* but because we *want*. Our second coin is our best self. Our second coin is Christ in us.

Once again, it was the scripture interpreting me, not I interpreting the scripture. If at the start of the week I feared I was the scribe in vv 38-40, by Sunday I felt the kind eye of Christ in vv 41-44.

I was ready to preach.
An Indispensable Member

Mary called on Wednesday morning to ask if I would visit her and Bruce (Bruce is a 90 year-old church member, Mary is his friend and companion). There was a sense of urgency in her voice. This was more than a social call. She was planning to go out of town for two weeks to visit her family, Mary explained, and would not be able to supervise Bruce's care. Her plan was to have him stay at a local skilled nursing facility, one that specialized in caring for patients with Alzheimer's Disease. Mary's concern was with Bruce's son who, she said, was insisting that his father not be told about the move to the nursing facility. He maintained that it would be best to "drop him off and leave," that this would avoid a potential scene and would ultimately be best for his father. Mary strongly disagreed, and planned to tell Bruce herself what would be happening. She loved him and could not imagine leaving him in a strange new setting, let alone a care facility, without presenting the plans beforehand. Would I come and be with her, Mary asked, when she told him?

Imagining myself in the middle of a family dispute, I nevertheless decided that it was no time for neutrality. As it was, I strongly agreed with Mary's approach. Bruce, a man of great dignity, deserved the chance to consent to the plans for his care. I agreed to come over later that afternoon.

But how would the visit go? How would Bruce take the news? What if he broke down? What if he refused to move? What if his son heard about our plans and interceded? My mind was filled with what-ifs. But I also realized how deeply I felt for Bruce. Mary's own affection and devotion to Bruce persuaded me that being honest with him was best. If I were in his shoes I would want that. The possibility of that occurrence was a sobering thought.

Mary met me at the door. She and Bruce had already talked, she said, and he had agreed with the move. How relieved I was! Sitting in his chair, Bruce was happy to see me. He was smiling. I sensed he had decided to honor Mary by consenting to her arrangement. While Bruce's words were garbled by dementia, intermittently I would hear him speaking with stunning clarity: "You have to have faith." "We're all in God's hands." We are indeed, I thought, and I am in the presence of a man who is teaching me about grace and faith.

Later in the week when practicing my preaching text, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, I was struck by the power of verse 22, On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable. It occurred to me that Bruce, physically and mentally weakened by age and dementia, was just this: he was an indispensable member of the body of Christ. I needed him; the church needed him. Without him we would be without this clear example of love at life's end. Here was a man unable to do anything, except witness to his trust in God. His years of service in the church and community -- and they were many -- were ended. Yet in his courage, faith, and love Bruce was proving the scripture's truth. By "clothing" him, this weaker member, "with greater honor" we were
honoring the Christ in him, the one who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death" (Phil 2:8).

What a privilege to be a part of this body, I thought. To be in the church, to be friends with a man such as Bruce (and a woman such as Mary), was to experience an intimate connection with Christ.

We are connected to each other because we need each other. We are the body of Christ. We need him. He needs us. In him we recognize those in the body who are indispensable.
APPENDIX E
SERMONS

Audio files of scripture performances and sermons at First Presbyterian Church of Santa Barbara may be heard on the church's website: http://www.fpesb.org/sermons.html.