

## The Divine Service: Sermon & Votum

**P** The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

**C** Amen.

*Philippians 4:7*

St. Paul says (Ephesians 4:11–16) that the Church receives gifts from her ascended Lord: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor / teachers. We have heard readings from the prophets (Old Testament), apostles (Epistle) and evangelists (Gospel). Now the congregation hears from its very own “pastor and teacher” in the sermon. (Kind, 23)

But as the apostles, prophets, and evangelists all together work toward “building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,” so does the congregation’s pastor and teacher. He is to attend to preaching—not of his own word or ideas, but attending to “the gift that is in [him] by the laying on of hands,” taking “heed to [him]self and [his] teaching...for by doing so [he] will save both [him]self and [his] hearers” (1 Tim 4:13–16).”

The pastor and teacher is charged with teaching the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), which means that he must not only harp on a few pet themes. The arrangement of the liturgical year, with assigned readings from which the sermon is to be developed, helps the pastor in covering this “whole counsel.” At the same time, it is not enough to just make sure everything is said at some point. The preacher must “rightly divide the Word of Truth” (2 Tim 2:15), or give to God’s servants “the proper food at the right time” (Luke 12:42) and so prove a faithful and wise steward.

This idea of “rightly dividing” God’s Word or “giving the *proper* food at the right time” suggests that preaching is concerned with Law and Gospel. This is not to say that each sermon must have a two part outline, I. Law and II. Gospel. But within each sermon Law and Gospel are the forces at work, and should be clearly identifiable. Each sermon needs to preach the Law. Sinners such as us need to hear God’s Law, to rebuke our sin, to identify our sinfulness, to correct our sometimes erring or self-seeking notions of what God would have us do. The Law preached must cut us to the heart, bringing us to repentance (Acts 2:37).

Then the Gospel must flow forth, that word which, unlike the Law, “is the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16)—the good news that, for Christ’s sake, on account of his death for us, and as assured by his resurrection, God forgives us our sins and gives us life and salvation. The Law is necessary, or the Gospel will be lost or ignored, but the preaching of the Gospel is the ultimate aim and charge of the Christian preacher (Mark 16:15). Law and Gospel make a sermon. Without them, it’s just talk. What does Jesus himself say about this, as he looks toward Pentecost? (Luke 24:22–49) What Law and Gospel do you hear today? The Sermon often closes with Paul’s words from Philippians 4:7. How are these fitting conclusion to this preaching of Law and Gospel?