THE OLD TESTAMENT COLLECTION

Preaching Christ in the Old Testament during the Church Year

REV. KEN SCHURB
Department of Youth Ministry, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Used by permission.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To adopt an overworked image, I feel like a pygmy standing on the shoulders of giants. Trying to mention any of them is dangerous because I might leave someone out, but any such listing would have to start with the pastor who instructed me in the catechism, the Rev. L. James Rongstad. He initially led me into concentrated study of the Old Testament. From his powerful example in Christ I first learned about preaching.

I would be terribly remiss were I not to name several of my seminary professors in the relevant disciplines, including visiting and adjunct instructors. In the field of preaching, I received outstanding training from Gerhard Aho and recently from my former classmate Carl Fickenscher II in a continuing education course. My communication skills in general were honed through my work with Harold Zietlow, who honored me by treating me as a partner. For my Old Testament courses I had fine professors (Douglas Judisch, Raymond Surburg, and John Wilch), but I daresay this CD-ROM resource reflects still more the practical theology instruction of Phillip Giessler and John Saleska. Through their courses in Christian education and counseling, respectively, they taught me a great deal of Old Testament. The sermons in this collection on Leviticus 16, Joshua 7, Judges 2 and 16, 2 Kings 6, Zechariah 3, and Malachi 4 have especially deep roots in Dr. Giessler’s lectures.

In the footnotes of the various sermons I have attempted to give due credit for particular assistance I have received from various sources. A few have been of overall help and should be noted here. I did not have the privilege of sitting in the classroom under Dr. Martin Naumann, who taught for almost a quarter of a century at my alma mater, Concordia Theological Seminary, when it was located in Springfield, Illinois. However, I am greatly indebted to his brief work Messianic Mountaintops.¹ I certainly have never met Dr. George Stoeckhardt except on the pages of his writings, but I have found very valuable his Advent Sermons (An Exposition of the Principal Messianic Prophecies of the

¹ Published in The Springfielder 39 (September 1975).
In addition, I have frequently and gratefully consulted the work of a sixteenth-century Old Testament professor and preacher named Martin Luther.

A current seminary professor who contributed greatly to this work is my friend and former colleague David Adams. Even with a very heavy workload pressing upon him at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, he helped me identify my blind spots in selecting Old Testament pericopes for preaching. By his expert answers to questions I raised about the biblical text, he prevented some exegetical blunders on my part. However, any shortcomings of this book, in interpretation, proclamation, or whatever else, remain my sole responsibility.

This resource is dedicated to the two congregations I have been privileged to serve as pastor. Peace Lutheran Church, Berne, Indiana, heard about half of these sermons a number of years ago, and more recently all of them were preached at Zion Lutheran Church, Moberly, Missouri. In the past many have been featured on Zion Lutheran Church’s Web site, thanks in part to the secretarial and webmastering efforts of Heather Fallis and Michelle Gerike. Vance Downing of Zion helped transcribe several of these sermons. Another member of Zion, my wonderful wife, Läna, helped me with the business of securing permissions from various copyright holders to utilize sermon illustrations. My thanks to all!

Ken Schurb
Trinity Sunday, 2009

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Translated by Erwin Koehlinger (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1984).
A NOTE ON USAGE

This CD-ROM resource contains sermons that move through the Old Testament in historical sequence, starting with Genesis and ending with Malachi, over a year’s time. These sermons mesh with appropriate Church Year themes. Generally, sermons during the Advent and Christmas seasons are based on texts from Genesis; sermons in the Epiphany season are from the rest of the Pentateuch; sermons in Lent derive from texts in the former prophets; sermons in the Easter season are on texts describing the life of David; the Pentecost sermon is on Solomon’s dedication of the temple; sermons for roughly the first half of the Sundays after Pentecost are from texts on the period of the divided kingdom; and the remaining sermons treat texts on the story of Judah to the end of the Old Testament.

Why a resource like this? Several reasons:

• It provides preachers, high school religion teachers, and college theology professors teaching Old Testament survey a set of tools with which to sketch the contours of Old Testament history and theology. Note that the sermons do not go into detail on the prophets, and they hardly touch wisdom literature. The accent here is on telling the Old Testament story in a day of declining biblical literacy.

• Bible class attendance is sluggish. In many congregations, any message for widespread dissemination must be included in church services, where the people are. This resource gives preachers a relatively “painless” way to go through the Old Testament in sermons that can be preached week in and week out for an entire Church Year if desired. Or perhaps these Old Testament sermons could be preached one quarter or season of the Church Year at a time, thus taking several years to use all 61 sermons.

• Expository preaching resources often ignore the Church Year. This resource sets up preachers and others with a way to put people in touch with the Old Testament Scriptures in sequence without ignoring Church Year themes and emphases.

• Expository preaching resources seldom feature a Lutheran sensitivity to Law and Gospel. This resource does. Conversely, Lutheran preaching resources may or may not be expository in orientation. The sermons in this resource are.

One word of advice: in the non-festival half of the Church Year, choose carefully which texts and sermons you might skip immediately after Trinity Sunday. For example, you probably do not want to omit explaining how the kingdom divided. You will then not
want to omit sermon 35, even if you end up preaching it on a Sunday later than that of “Proper 3.”

Finally, these sermons can be helpful to a preacher who does not want to preach them in the sequence offered here. The index (located on the CD as a separate file) will help you locate sermons in this book based on texts that appear as Old Testament lessons in the LSB lectionaries.
ABBREVIATIONS

AE

Concordia

IBP

Klaus

WA

Windows
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MEET GOD!

2 SAMUEL 23:1–5

Today we take a step backward, a rarity in this Old Testament sermon series. Usually we follow the time line as it moves along. The Easter season sermons, for example, dealt with David. We started with his battle against Goliath when he was young. Finally we reached Absalom’s rebellion, which occurred after David had been king of Israel for years and his children had grown. Last week we considered a scene from after David’s death, when Solomon prayed at the dedication of the new temple. But today we step back in time and look at David yet again. Several of the things he said are very appropriate for Trinity Sunday, and today we want to look at one of them.

Sometimes the words of our text are called the “last words” of David, even though they are not literally the final words David spoke before he died. Perhaps it would be best for us to think of these words as David’s farewell address. Often in farewell addresses, people of accomplishment call attention to what they have done. Others, more nobly, make farewell addresses like George Washington’s. They point to threats, challenges, and potential for the future. But David did not talk about himself or about the wisdom he had accumulated on how to govern. Characteristically, David’s farewell address was about God. David had been bowled over by God. What God had told him may have seemed too good to be true. Yet it was true, and David rejoiced in it. David had met God.

David is, of course, far from the only person in history to have been all wrapped up in God. Think of the Early Church, going to the world with the message of the crucified and risen Christ. These people kept praying, singing, thinking, writing, proclaiming, serving, even suffering and dying because they were passionately consumed with God. To this day, the Church Year includes Trinity Sunday, a Sunday devoted to God the Three in One. Are we passionately consumed? Are we engaged with the Lord on this Trinity Sunday? Or do we just yawn? Maybe we need to meet him all over again.

It is hard to get a lot of people in the world today to be very excited about God, especially God as praised in the text. Even in the Church, we can be slow to sing about him the way the psalmist David did. We would like to think we can keep God at arm’s
length. We figure we can pull him in whenever we need him, but otherwise not. This is hardly the way to treat human beings, yet it is the way we so often treat the Lord. Then after we have held him at arm’s length, at least in our own minds, we discover that we cannot get very excited about him!

David had learned his lesson from God. As we saw a few sermons back, he found that you cannot domesticate the Lord. A domesticated God forms no threat, but gives no help either. No matter what we think or say, however, God remains who he is.

These days, keeping God at arm’s length often means remaining pretty loose and indeterminate about him, not daring to get too specific. Another way to try to domesticate God is what might be called domestication by formula. We can be tempted toward it on Trinity Sunday. Earlier, we spoke the Athanasian Creed. This creed might seem to contain everything there is to know about God. We can grow to think that though defining God is an elaborate job, it is a job that can be done. Beware of this temptation. The Athanasian Creed confesses a God we cannot define or limit. We cannot fully understand him, and we would know nothing about him had he not revealed it. Cults sometimes make fun of the doctrine of the Trinity, saying in essence that it cannot be true because we cannot understand it. Well, we need a God we cannot understand, not a god we can understand. Any god we can fold up and fit into the back pocket of our minds is nothing more than a domesticated idol, powerless to help.

We can understand God only as far as he has revealed himself. What Scripture says is true, but it does not tell us everything. There is good reason to summarize the teaching of Scripture in creeds, but let us never forget that God’s Word is more than mere thought. It is alive and powerful, as alive and powerful as God himself. In his Word, God speaks to us. If we only want to talk about him but never want to talk to him, responding in prayer to the One who addresses us, we end up treating God like a domesticated idol. If all we want to do is talk about God, but we never stop to hear God himself as he speaks to us, then we are like the demons who know all about God—and shudder. (See James 2:19.)

We need to meet God. Repenting of our sin and unbelief, we continually need to meet him all over again. This need brings us right back to David’s farewell address. Here was a
man who had met God. His farewell address is consumed with the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (though not in that order).

Meet God: introduced by the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me,” says the text, “his word is on my tongue.” Here is an Old Testament mention of the Holy Spirit, and an Old Testament instance of the biblical teaching that the Bible is inspired by God. The Holy Spirit himself was providing David with these words of instruction and of adoration. This is not David’s best guess about God; it is the Word of God himself. For unless God himself speaks to us, the best we could ever have would be human words about God.

What good would that really do: simply to be told about God? “I want to have him myself,” as C. F. W. Walther once put it. “I want to hear from his lips, Thy sins be forgiven thee. Be of good cheer.” He went on to tell a sad story of a young man, probably an immigrant to the United States, who became separated from his father on the way out West. “With great sorrow he sought him. Then he met some fine, pious people who told him about his father. One had seen him in Buffalo, another somewhere else. But as much as the poor child traveled here and there, he never found his father . . . the souls of sinners are not satisfied with a report which tells them about their Father. They thirst after God, after the living God.”

So it is. How good it is that we have God’s own Word to tell us how he is disposed toward us! When he tells us of love and grace and blessing, we can believe it despite everything. For like David we have met God, introduced to him by God himself—God the Holy Spirit.

Meet God. And when you meet him as David met him, that meeting will be centered in Christ, the “Rock of Israel.” In him we sinners find shelter. He is our Refuge and Fortress. He became all these things by living and dying for us, then rising again.

To see David’s reference to Christ, we have to look at his words a bit more closely. David said, “When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them

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like the morning light.” He added a bit later, “For does not my house stand so with God?”

Was this a boast? In his farewell address, was the king blowing his own horn after all?

Not so! Despite all of David’s accomplishments, his rule could hardly be called completely just and righteous, certainly not by the Lord’s standards. As consumed with God as David was, he did not walk in the fear of God in all his ways. His adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite and his murder of Uriah stand out as but the tip of the iceberg of David’s sin. Now, toward the end of his life and reign, David could readily look back and realize that it was only God’s great mercy that kept him from going the way of his predecessor Saul, rejected and damned.

David was well aware that his house had its good standing with God because, as he said in the text, God had “made with me an everlasting covenant.” Under this covenant, everything that helped and saved David was to sprout. The prophets were inspired to pick up on this idea, referring to the righteous Sprout and the Branch of Righteousness. This is our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Man who is also God, he is both the Ruler of people everywhere and the Ruler who fears God—and he does it all perfectly. He gives people the righteousness of his own obedience to God, his fearing and loving God above all things. He gave it to David. When you and I are in Christ by faith, we have this righteousness too. For like David we have met God, and the meeting is centered in Christ.

Finally, meet God, welcomed by none other than the Father. We have all heard stories of people who wore out their welcome with friends or relatives. This has been the premise of many a funny movie. When people wear out their welcome, they risk never being welcome in that place again. We need never fear wearing out our welcome with our Father in heaven, though. The text calls him both the God of Jacob and the God of Israel. Jacob and Israel, of course, were two names for one man. Jacob was his name in his “tricky tripper” youth, and Israel was the name God at length gave him. If the Lord could be patient with Jacob, and make him Israel, he is extremely patient with us.

As noted, David delighted in the Father’s “everlasting covenant.” Some of God’s promises to David had strings attached. The conditions were that David and his kingly descendants continue to serve the Lord. But the promise to send the Messiah into the world through David’s line, the promise of salvation, had no strings whatsoever. It stood
out as a promise of grace, grace in which we cannot wear out our welcome. Therefore the covenant was “ordered in all things and secure.” Like the New Testament says, nothing can separate us from the Father’s love in Christ Jesus. In this love, the Father welcomes us as we meet God.

So meet God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Knowing him is something to sing about as David did, and not only on Trinity Sunday.

Suppose you knew for certain that tomorrow you would meet the President of the United States, or some comparable dignitary. Can you imagine the goose bumps you would have already now? Or suppose that tomorrow you knew you were going to meet some long-lost friend or relative with whom you used to be very close. That, too, would produce goose bumps. Now think of the double goose bumps you would have if this were one and the same person: if, for example, the President of the United States were your long-lost friend. In Word and Sacrament, we meet God. He is more powerful than any president, and he cares about us more than any friend. You don’t merely know about him; you know him. If we don’t know everything about him—such as how there can be three Persons in one God—what does it matter? Like David, we have met God: introduced by the Spirit, centered in Christ, and welcomed by the Father.
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