

## **Article: Why the Pulpit?**

Many Lutheran churches are doing away with their pulpits. Instead, the pastor will walk from side to side up the front of the church when delivering his sermon. This is sad. Pulpits were created to assist the proclamation of the Word. How so? They do so by focusing the eye where the Word is proclaimed and preached. They also do that by elevating the speaker to help the voice reach the ears of the hearers. If the pulpit is tucked in a corner or has some kind of surface like a wall close behind, that further helps to provide a soundboard or solid surface behind the preacher, which makes the voice louder.

If we forget all that, then pulpits became mere pieces of furniture, more for the appearance than for what they are designed for. It is a sad day when we begin to think of the pulpit as an art design exercise more than a useful tool of the Word to aid the preacher. Perhaps it began when church buildings started to be expressions of the imagination of the designers and builders more than the assembly of the faithful around the Word and Sacraments of our Lord. Perhaps it is related to the advent of public address systems, which tend to make preachers lazy and rely more on sound enhancement than the use of their voices and the locus of their voices in a pulpit.

I do not view this as a conservative or liberal issue but one of effective use of the tools for the preaching task. The pastor ought to stay in the pulpit. But do not hide in that pulpit as if it were a refuge. Rather, use that pulpit as a tool and an aid. It gives presence to the Word and the one who preaches that Word. It draws attention to the solemnity of the Word that is preached and reminds the preacher and hearer that this is not about the pastor or his opinions or his storytelling ability, or how well he entertains.

He is a servant of the Word, and the pulpit can be an effective tool for the servant to perform his tasks.

Some may think it is cool to be set free to roam around, but I think it feeds the preacher's ego as much as the pulpit can humble it. We are here for a holy purpose, and the Word entrusted to us is not something to be toyed with. The sooner we learn this, the better. I am all for serious preachers and serious preaching, for pulpits that display the gravitas of the Word preached from them, of pulpits that give visual weight and prominence to the importance of God's Word proclaimed and preached, and of the ease of our people both hearing and understanding what is preached.