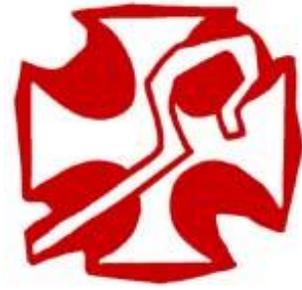# *Writing for the Ear*
Summer Quarter 2014

I.   Course Identification

WR9001.OL
1.5 credits
June 9 – August 8

II.   Course Description

In writing sermons, we strive for a style that is not highly structured and academic. It is less formal, more concrete and conversational. It is writing for the ear. Yet much of the writing we did in years of formal education was more academic and abstract, a style more suited to reports and essays. It was writing for the eye. So it remains a challenge to get rid of the stiff, abstract, and formal writing that wants to creep back into our sermons. To help meet that challenge, this course will begin by identifying key characteristics of writing for the ear (including an emphasis on retelling well biblical narrative). We will then work to evaluate individually where we are strong and weak in those characteristics. Finally, we will seek to put those skills to work in sermon writing that displays a growing facility in writing for the ear.

III.   Course Goals (Learning Outcomes) and Objectives (Assessment Standards)

Goals are displayed in bold text.
Objectives are displayed in plain text.

1. To grow in the conviction that the careful crafting of the written sermon is perfectly fitting with an understanding of the simultaneous two-fold working of the Word (psychological and supernatural). (Introductory Lesson)
    1.1   On the basis of a reading and discussing of an article from Professor John Meyer and introductions from the books *Preaching as Art: Biblical Storytelling for a Media Generation* and *Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively*, the students will be able to articulate an understanding of the twofold way the Word works (psychological and supernatural) and how a careful crafting of the written sermon fits into such a theological understanding.

2. To understand key elements of how writing for the ear is different from more formal academic writing. (Unit 1: Lessons 2-4)
    2.1   On the basis of reading and discussing the introduction and chapters 1-8 & 11 of *Just Say the Word: Writing for the Ear*, the student will have identified a top-ten list of what makes for good writing for the ear.

2.2   On the basis of a personal evaluation of a three-sermon sample of his previous writing, the student will have identified his personal top-five challenges when it comes to writing for the ear.

2.3   The student will submit a sermon preached during the second unit of the class which gives evidence that he has begun to improve in personal areas of weakness in writing for the ear. The submission will include his personal top-five list of where he needs to improve in writing for the ear and some brief commentary on where in the sermon he believes he has addressed those challenges.

3. To understand how to help hearers of sermons more easily remember what they have heard. (Unit 2: Lessons 5-9)

3.1   On the basis of reading and discussing the introduction and first five chapters of *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die,* the student will have identified a top ten list of applications to sermon writing from these five characteristics: simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, and emotional.

3.2   On the basis of a personal evaluation of a three-sermon sample of his previous writing, the student will have identified his personal top-five challenges when it comes to making the ideas of his sermons "sticky."

3.3   The student will submit a sermon preached during the third unit of the class which gives evidence that he has begun to improve in personal areas of weakness in making the ideas of his sermons more "sticky." The submission will include his personal top-five list of where he needs to improve in making the ideas of his sermons more 'sticky" and some brief commentary on where in the sermon he believes he has addressed those challenges.

4. To grow in understanding the ability to tell biblical narrative well. (Unit 3; Lessons 10-12)

4.1   On the basis of reading and discussing chapters 9 & 10 of *Just Say the Word: Writing for the Ear,* and chapter 6 of *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, the student will have identified a top-ten list of what makes for good retelling of biblical narrative.

4.2   On the basis of his personal evaluation of a three-sermon sample of sermons on narrative texts, the student will have identified his personal top-five challenges when it comes to retelling biblical narrative.

IV.   General Outline

Daily Preparation

For each lesson there will be a variable combination of brief one-minute lectures, readings, and discussions based on the readings and lectures.   A lesson guide sheet will guide the student through the different sections of each lesson.

Lesson by lesson each student will be developing six lists: 1) the top-ten key characteristics of good writing for the ear; 2) a personal top-five writing for the ear checklist of unique challenges from previous personal writing on which to focus for future writing; 3) a personal top-five list of how to make sermon ideas "sticky"; 4) a top-ten list of how to retell biblical narrative well; 5) a top ten list for retelling biblical narrative; and 6) a personal top-five retelling biblical narrative checklist of unique challenges from previous personal writing on which to focus for future writing.

Sermon

The student will work on two sermons that will have been preached during class. The goal of these sermons is to put into concrete application what has been discussed and learned during the course.

Components of the Course Grade

Course participation component

Just as constructive class participation is evaluated by an instructor in a face-to-face course, so that will be part of the course grade for this online course. In an online course, such evaluation will be done through the forum discussions. Course participants will receive feedback throughout the course on their initial posts to discussion forums and on their responses to the posts of classmates.

Here is the evaluation rubric the instructor will use for initial postings to discussion forums:

1. Does the student give evidence of grasping the point of the reading?
2. Does the student given evidence of assimilating what was learned in the reading to his life/ministry?
3. Does the student's agreement/disagreement with the reading give evidence of careful thought and balanced evaluation?
4. Where a theological point is being made, does the student give clear scriptural evidence for the point he is making?

Here is the evaluation rubric the instructor will use for replies students make to the postings of their classmates:

1. Does the student give evidence of having taken the time to read and understand the point of his classmate's posting?
2. Does the reply contribute a substantive comment beyond merely saying "I agree" or "I disagree"?
3. Does the reply give solid evidence why there is agreement or disagreement?
4. Does the reply give evidence of speaking the truth in love even where disagreement is stated?

Major assignment (sermon) component

A student's sermons will not be evaluated in comparison with any other student's sermons.   God gives different gifts to us all. Instead, each sermon will be evaluated on two primary criteria: 1) does the personal check-list submitted with each sermon give evidence of having personally assimilated key elements of that particular unit of the course; and 2) does the sermon give evidence of being able to assimilate that learning into the task of sermon writing.

V.   Course Textbooks

Just Say the Word! Writing for the Ear by G. Robert Jacks (Eerdmans, 1996)

Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Thrive and Others Die [**with ADDED MATERIAL (now extra sticky!)]** by Chip Heath & Dan Heath (Random House, 2008)

Rich Gurgel
Summer 2014
gurgelr@wls.wels.net
office - (262) 242-8181
cell – (414) 573-5593