

By Pastor Merv Thompson

"Grace and peace to you from the God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Did You Know? Over 150,000 people per month are clicking onto our sermon website at Lutheran Church of Hope.

Did You Know? Over 1.25 million people have visited the site since 2006, with 3.5 million downloads.

Did You Know? The number one most listened to sermon is from March 26, 2006, entitled "Lamb Of God," which has been downloaded 46,748 times.

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Several years ago, May 13, 2005 to be exact, I reviewed a book by Rex Miller entitled [The Millennium Matrix](#). In the book Mr. Miller describes in sharp detail the four basic modes of communication which have predominated throughout history. His reason for writing at this time is that we are now in the midst of the fourth of these modes. His thesis is that each of these ways of communicating has shaped both the culture and the church, and when a change occurs in the mode, it changes everything.

What are these four modes of communication? The first is, of course, the oral tradition. Before the advent of any technology, the only way people had to communicate was person to person. Stories about the world and its meaning were passed down from one generation to another, from parents to children and grandchildren. Religious truth was communicated orally by stories and reflections by clergy and parents and elders.

The leader of the community and of the church most often was a person who had special skills in oral communication and the ability to speak or interpret. In fact the church often gave such a person strong authority, even calling him "Father." Some of these interpreters had scribes around them to write down the teaching. Much of the Bible was compiled in this manner. But very few people could read, and most of the teaching was communicated orally.

The second form of communication was accompanied by the invention of the printing press, that of writing

and publishing. Suddenly the most effective way of interpreting truth and meaning came through the written word, beginning of course, with the Bible. Martin Luther exemplified this change by translating the Bible from Latin, the language of scholars, to German, the language of the people. He also helped launch a public school movement so that children could learn how to read.

Because of the establishment of this new mode of communication, much of worship became centered around the Bible and the hymnbook. Certain devotional books became commonplace, and education was centered around the study of written material.

The third mode of communication came suddenly around 1950 with the invention of television and the broadcast industry. This new form did not take long to transform the culture. By the mid-1950's most of America had turned to television from other forms of communication. This revolution has created profound changes in the culture.

However, as most of us are aware, the church could not figure out how to respond to this new way of communicating. In fact the church viewed this change with a good deal of skepticism. It is not hard to see how this has become problematic. When the culture changes the forms of communication, if the church resists, it quickly becomes marginalized. No doubt this is one reason why the church has been in sharp decline in recent decades, as it seeks to continue its pre-broadcast method of communication.

The rather disturbing news today, of course, is that while the church has not been able to figure out how to respond to television and broadcasting, suddenly in the midst of our malaise, we have moved into the fourth mode of communication, that of digital. While we might like to say to the world, "Hold on until we figure out the most recent change of communication," we do not get to vote on the changes. Digital is here, and again we have little idea of how to respond to this.

Lutheran Church of Hope has been well ahead of the curve on the changing modes of communication. Pastor Mike realized early on that people learn today in a variety of ways, they learn from oral communication, from the written mode, and from the visual. Thus we are centered around the oral tradition in the sermons and teaching, around the written word in Bible Study and resources, and in the visual learning on the screens for worship, Alpha and other opportunities. I am so used to the visual learning at Hope that when I worship at other churches without any screens, I find it to be disconcerting.

Hope has also gone digital, much of this below the radar. I was absolutely stunned to learn how quickly this has developed, multiplying exponentially. 150,000 clicks per month, just amazing. I was also shocked to learn that people in China are the second-largest group of people listening to these sermons. I have no idea how that is happening. China is followed by Germany, Switzerland, Taiwan and Australia.

I also learned that the second most popular downloaded sermon is from December 3, 2006, "Here Comes The King," with 27,000 downloads. The third most popular is from April 30, 2006, "Beautiful Day," 26,000 downloads. The most popular from 2008 is "Well, Well, Well," from February 17th, with more than 5,000 downloads.

In addition, our web site, www.hopewdm.org, has up to 20,000 clicks per month, well over 200,000 for the year, doubling the numbers of one year ago. The most popular site on our web site beside the sermons has been that of "The Year of the Bible," as people are tracking with all of us in this exciting journey.

Michael Hurst, our great friend and partner in ministry from Elim Fellowship says it this way, "You cannot be an analog church in a digital age."

One of the more practical ways in which digital has become so important to the church is in the way people can respond immediately and personally. At the present time, most of our registering for events is taking place on-line. This no doubt contributed greatly to the fact that Alpha has 450 participants this quarter, the largest group in our history, and that we received over 400 new members in January. The sense of immediacy with on-line response is transforming the way the church reaches out to its

members, and most importantly, to those who are not members.

Four modes of communication. The church very effectively used the first two modes, both the spoken and the written word. The third mode, that of television and visual communication has stymied much of the church. And now the fourth mode, digital, is finding some response among congregations, although it is rare that a church has any kind of appreciation of the potential of such technology.

Lutheran Church of Hope is demonstrating some of the ways in which these new forms of communication might be utilized to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Next time you download a sermon from Hope, give thanks for these new ways of communicating, and for the people we have at Hope who have the understanding and the ability to make this happen. And, by the way, you can find all of the Updates since 2004 just by clicking on the web site, hitting News and then publications. Amazing to one who still lives primarily in the oral and written world.