

## **Be a Berean!**

*The Bereans...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day.* (Acts 17:11)

["Be a Berean" will regularly cover topics that arise during Lockport Alliance Bible classes. Contact Franklyn Pfeil—[liftedup@lockportalliance.org](mailto:liftedup@lockportalliance.org)—with questions or comments.]

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### **"A Big Cross in the Margin"**

While Kevin's on sabbatical, I'll slip this in, so he won't see it and think I'm buttering his toast.

I know him only through his work. Soon after we began attending Lockport Alliance, Shelley began [lockportalliance.org](http://lockportalliance.org), the church website. It was, for the most part, dial-up in those days. (You remember your computer caterwauling, hissing, gurgling, and setting your teeth on edge as the dial-up connection was made!) The baud was too slow for most people to download audio sermons, so we posted Kevin's sermons in written form.

As a devoted student of rhetoric, I transcribed Kevin's sermons from the notes I furiously scribbled as he spoke each Sunday. For two or three years, going to church meant warp-speed note taking, but I did it gladly. Preachers, teachers, politicians--and your mother when she was on your case--each leave a rhetorical 'fingerprint.' Words make shape; they whirl, swirl, collide, elide, and elicit in patterns that are unique to the individual. After transcribing 30 or 40 sermons, I knew where the crests, the troughs, the undertow, and the eddies would meet, swell, and delimit.

But the sonorous flow of his syntactical current isn't the reason that I keep my family under his tutelage. The reason he's our pastor is because of "the big cross in the margin."

Let me explain. As I was transcribing each week, a great thing happened to me: I began to learn more about the Word than about words! Your typical evangelical pastor will bring you to the cross now and again. But it became apparent that this preacher had no other destination in mind.

A friend of mine, since moved away--who shares my appreciation for rhetorical construct--always sat two sections over and several rows back. Together, we began to note the unrelenting "cross purpose" of Kevin's messages. When Kevin reached the point where Christ was crucified for our sins, we flashed the thumbs-up sign across the aisles: Jesus had been *lifted up* (1) once again. It must have seemed odd, maybe irreverent, to any onlooker who happened to notice. But it was our tribute to two men--the Messiah and His messenger--both faithful to their mission. He'd taken us to the cross for 50 sermons in a row before we stopped counting, deciding it was no use quantifying infinity.

I retain the reflex to this day. My thumb flips up at the cross every Sunday. I got a call from my friend a while ago and we were talking about those days and the old thumbs-up signal. I asked him if his current preacher goes to the cross every single week.

"Not every week. I sit there hoping for 'more matter, with less art.' I miss those days and the amazing 50-sermon streak. Tell the people what they've got, Franklyn."

"I will, my friend, I will."

Along the way, Kevin's managed to bother and badger a lot of the hell right out of me. I remember his injunction (call it harping, and not always in a heavenly sense!) to locate our gifts, to open them and put them to use. Frustrated, not knowing what I could do but wanting to pitch in, I searched for my gift like the kid who's still searching for his Easter basket an hour after the others found theirs. If he'd laid down his harp, so to speak, I would have missed out on the gift that has made these the finest days of my life.

As I'd searched, it became apparent that God had given me a (nearly inordinate) hunger and thirst for His Word, and a great desire to see others become as famished and parched as I! That was when I made an appointment with Kevin to ask how one goes about launching a teaching ministry. As our session wound down and I was about to leave, I told him about the amazing 50-sermon streak and the thumbs-up sign. I had often wondered, so I asked him, "Is a streak like that by training, or by the Spirit?"

"Both," he immediately replied. Then he told me that it's his habit to draw a big cross in the margin of his sermon notes at the point where the simple gospel message--*Christ crucified* (2)--is pronounced.

I don't remember the year, but I shall never forget the Sunday when our church first hung the big wooden cross in the sanctuary. As Kevin pointed to it with reverence and awe and appreciation, a most wonderful irony transfused the scene. I felt like standing and shouting, "He's been pointing to it for a hundred straight Sundays!"

I like that big cross. But you could take it out of the sanctuary and it wouldn't matter--because in our pulpit stands God's man telling forth God's Word, with a big cross in the margin.

And sometimes with a little crack in his voice, which I could never transcribe.

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Scripture cited: (1) see John 12:32-33; (2) 1 Corinthians 1:23

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It is our fervent hope that you will 'be a Berean' by attending one of these Bible-based classes this week! —

"Learning to Lead"--Sunday at 9:45

"If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat"--Sunday at 9:45

"Speak God's Word"--Sunday at 9:45