

PREACHING TOMORROW TODAY
Preaching In A Postmodern Context

by

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ABSTRACT

Modern culture is always changing. The preacher preaches in a post-modern culture to an emerging church. Therefore we have to “Preach Tomorrow, Today.” Though culture is changing and shifting the message of the Gospel is the same yesterday, today and forever. New methods and styles are being introduced as the next great breakthrough in preaching and therefore need to be evaluated in the light of what has come before.

In this thesis I have examined a number of components that are important to preaching. The first chapter overviews preaching to a postmodern reality. The second chapter treats preaching in a visual culture. The third chapter shows how imagination may be used in preaching. Chapter four considers the importance of embodiment in preaching. The final chapter explores the intergraded preaching model of Kenton Anderson for the preparation of the sermon. The appendices evaluations which have been completed by members of Aeon Baptist Church.

Use of the intergraded preaching model had a positive impact on the preacher in the preparation and delivery of the sermon. The evaluations indicated a greater degree of sermon relevance and application to the congregation.

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Chapter 1

Preaching to a Post-Modern Reality

“In the front pews the old ladies turn up their hearing aids, and a young lady slips her six year old a Lifesaver and a Magic Marker. A college sophomore home from vacation, who is there because he was dragged there, slumps forward with his chin in his hand. The vice-president of a bank who twice that week has seriously contemplating suicide places his hymnal in a rack. A pregnant girl feels the life stir inside her. A high-school math teacher, who for twenty years has managed to keep his homosexuality a secret for the most part even from himself, creases his order of service down the center with his thumbnail and tucks it under his knee.... The preacher pulls the little cord that turns on the lectern light and deals out his note cards like a river boat gambler. The stakes have never been higher.”¹

These are the words of Frederick Buechner as he describes the preaching moment.

¹Philip Yancy, Soul Survivor (Toronto: Doubleday ,2001) 247.

Buechner speaks of a time called modernism; a time when people came to church to hear the Word of God spoken with great oratory; a time when sermons were published and read; a time when listeners interacted by taking notes: a time when sermons were built with logical points, poems and premises. Today the preacher has to speak to a postmodern generation where experience outweighs reason, felt needs have a desire to be fulfilled, tolerance has replaced absolutes, technology has replaced art, and words like ‘casual’ and ‘contemporary’ have replaced ‘tradition’. It is still true, “the stakes have never been higher.”

“The transition from the modern era to a postmodern era poses a grave challenge to the church in its mission to its own generation,” acknowledges Stanley Grenz. “Confronted by this new context we dare not fall into the trap of wistfully longing for a return to the early modernity that gave evangelicalism its birth, for we are called to minister not to the past but to the contemporary context, and our contemporary context is influenced by postmodern ideas... It would be tragic if evangelicals ended up as the last defenders of the now dying modernity. To reach people in the new postmodern context, we must set ourselves to the task of deciphering the implications of postmodernism for the gospel.”² We must come to understand the times in which we live.

Deciphering the Postmodern world is not easy. Leonard Sweet in his book Aqua Church uses water to describe today’s culture. Postmodernism doesn’t want

²Graham Johnson, Preaching to a Postmodern World. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2001) 15.

or cannot define itself. To be post modern is to be always changing, always in flux, having no concrete understanding or absolute definitions about anything including reality and truth. Being undefined is postmodern. According to Stanley Grenz, “the term postmodern may first have been coined in the 1930s to refer to a major historical transition already underway in the arts community. Postmodernism did not gain widespread attention until the 1970s.”³

The history or development of postmodernism began with the Renaissance which taught the elevation of humankind to the center of reality. The Enlightenment elevated the individual self to the center of the world. The Enlightenment was a movement of intellectual inquiry and freedom in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe that questioned tradition as a source of truth. Instead, it asserted that human reason alone could discern truth and unlock the secrets of the universe. The Enlightenment lasted as a formal philosophical movement only into the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment approach to life, however, lingered long after the formal movement ended. In fact, it furnished the entire modernist age with its distinctive worldview, founded upon a belief in objective reason and science.

Rene Decartes laid the philosophical foundations with his focus on doubt. Isaac Newton provided the scientific framework for modernity, picturing the physical world as a machine with laws and regularity which could be discovered and understood by the human mind. In Arnold Toynbee’s multi-volume Study of History he argues that “the postmodern era began with the end of the Western dominance

³Stanley J.Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 2.

in culture and the decline of individualism, capitalism, and Christianity. He argues that the transition occurred as Western civilization drifted into irrationality and relativism.” According to Toynbee, power shifted from the West to non-Western cultures to a new pluralist world culture.⁴

The Enlightenment assumed that knowledge was not only certain and hence rational but also objective. Enlightenment thinkers assumed that this knowledge is inherently good, rendering an optimistic outlook on life.⁵

Postmodernism rejects the thinking of the Enlightenment. Postmodern thinking abandons the quest for a unified grasp of objective reality. It teaches that the world has no centre, only differing viewpoints and perspectives. People today are no longer convinced that knowledge is inherently good. Postmodernism entails a rejection of the emphasis on rational discovery through the scientific method, which provided the intellectual foundation for the modern attempt to construct a better world. “At its foundation the postmodern outlook is anti-modern.”⁶

Basic to Christianity is the sovereignty of God. He is working everything out according to His purpose. This is a big story which gives an overarching explanation of the world as we know it. This can be called a “meta-narrative.” In the Greek, “meta” conveys the idea of an overarching purpose that gives meaning to everything in the universe. Over all the particulars of life there is a grand design

⁴Ibid.,16.

⁵Ibid., 4.

⁶Ibid.,12.

and purpose for everything which originates in the heart of God. There is an explanation in all of history. This is foundational to our correct understanding of God and the Bible. The postmodernist denies that there can be such a thing as a meta-narrative. Instead, the postmodernist believes that each person constructs his or her own “narrative,” or reality, usually depending on one’s own community of knowledge. For example the collapse of communism has reinforced the postmodernist’s denial of meta-narratives because Marxism claimed to be a monolithic system that explained everything.⁷ “The Christian meta-narrative has been discounted by the world for a long time” says Hulse, “but it is only in the last quarter of the 20th century that the humanistic, rationalistic one has been questioned radically by the postmodernists.⁸

Grenz challenges the church to move from the age of modernity to post-modernity so that we might continue to be heard in this postmodern world. “The transition from the modern era to the postmodern era poses a grave challenge to the church in its mission to its own generation. Confronted by this new context, we dare not fall into the trap of wistfully longing for a return to the early modernity that gave evangelicalism its birth, for we are called to minister not to the past but to the contemporary context, and our contemporary context is influenced by post-modern ideas.”⁹ The challenge will be to preach the gospel in the new postmodern context.

⁷Erroll Hulse, Postmodernism (Pensacola: Chapel Library, 2003) 4.

⁸Ibid., 5.

⁹Ibid.,10.

To preach Christ, by embodying the Christian faith in ways that a new generation can understand.

Modernism was characterized by organization, structure, and orderliness.¹⁰ Pure modernism held to a single, universal worldview and moral standard, a belief that all knowledge is good and certain, truth is absolute, individualism is valued, and thinking, learning, and beliefs should be determined systematically and logically. “Postmodernism, then, holds there is no single universal worldview. Truth is not absolute, community is valued over individualism.”¹¹

The postmodernist lives in a world that mistrusts organizations and most of all organized religion. Structure and orderliness are not necessary to a post-modernist. Absolute truth with its authority has been replaced with tolerance to believe in “whatever.” For the postmodernist there is no such thing as absolute truth. When asked for a response of agreement concerning absolutes, in terms of disagreement, strong agreement, strong disagreement, or uncertainly, the majority of those who identified themselves as born-again Christians and a majority of those who considered themselves evangelical Christians either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, suggesting a belief in the relativity of truth.

In the Christian belief system there is an objective authority for humans. That authority is God. “Much of postmodernism has rejected the idea of an external God

¹⁰Millard J. Erickson, The Post Modern World. (Wheaton: Crossway Books 2002) 25

¹¹Dan Kimball, The Emerging Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2003) 50

who has the right to prescribe what is right and what is true.”¹²

In the September/October issue of The Christian Reader, a popular public magazine published by Christianity Today, an interview was conducted with Michelle Williams, a member of a very successful female singing group called Destiny’s Child. The interviewer asked Williams, “Some people will wonder about your connection to Destiny’s Child. Some of the outfits that the group wears seem to communicate a sexual message. How do you reconcile that with your faith?” Williams’ response, “I look at this as my job. That’s not who we really are. When we’re offstage, we’ve got on jeans and sweat suits. No one has a religious job all the time. It’s no different than with any secular job. A doctor puts on scrubs. Being a hair-dresser, that is a secular job. So [Destiny’s Child] is my job, and that is my uniform.” This is true Postmodern thinking from a young person who would call herself a Christian. To be able to separate one’s lifestyle from one’s spiritual commitment is very post-modern. A postmodern person would sum up this interview with words like, it may be true for you but it is not true for me.

The postmodern understanding of knowledge is built on two foundational assumptions: (1) postmoderns view all explanations of reality as constructions that are useful but not objectively true, and (2) postmoderns deny that we have the ability to step outside our constructions of reality. Therefore postmodernism adopts a pluralistic view of knowledge.¹³

¹²Ibid., 68.

¹³Grenz, 43.

Grenz reminds us that postmodern understanding of truth leads postmoderns to be less concerned than their forebears to think systematically or logically. For example, “a postmodern Christian may affirm both the classic doctrines of the church and such traditionally non-Christian ideas as reincarnation.”¹⁴

The consequence of postmodern thinking can be characterized by three catch phrases. First, “Works for me. “ Postmodern people don’t make judgments. Life is very pragmatic. Second, “Whatever.” They’re tentative in their conclusion and are content to have conflicting ideas. This all purpose response allows them to take any direction that strikes their fancy. Third, “Who cares” with no question mark. Postmoderns take a devil-may-care approach to life.¹⁵

The postmoderns have no place in their thinking for Biblical absolutes. Even to preach the text “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by me,” would be unacceptable for a postmodern thinker, accusing the preacher of absolutism. For the postmodern person each person’s truth is truth for him or her, and to suggest that one is attempting to persuade another person of one’s own truth is a rejection of that person, or a mark of disrespect. From disrespect, says this view, comes hate.

¹⁴Grenz, 15.

¹⁵Kenton C. Anderson, Preaching with Conviction (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001) 30.

The September 30, 2003 issue of The Chester Clipper gives an example of how postmoderns react to someone with an opinion that is biblically based.

“I was just perusing through your community newspaper, “The Chester Clipper, Tuesday September 23, 2003. Being a person who appreciates antiques, I of course took great delight in discovering that you have a column titled “Antiques Answer Man.”

I enjoyed the article until I arrived at the last paragraph and realized that Mr. Cameron was not only discussing antiques but also his political, religious or moral views about his exclusive definition of marriage. I am outraged that as an editor you have allowed him to express such inflammatory sentiments in a column where the content is expected to be about antiques and not draconian viewpoints on the institute of marriage. I am pleased to read that Mr. Cameron informs his reading public about his “happy” marriage. Good for him. I am, however, deeply disturbed that Mr. Cameron feels that in one sentence he can invalidate and deem all other unions and relationships as valueless because they don’t come under his exclusive definition of a marriage.

How very tedious it is to constantly be bombarded and bulldozed by narrow, smug and small-minded people. Perhaps, it’s time for Mr. Cameron to learn about more than antiques.” 16

In this article we see an example of post modern pluralism. Pluralism means there is a level playing field for all religions or moral values. Religion and moral values are matters of personal choice. The one great heresy is to say that your religion or moral value is correct and all the others are wrong. Tolerance is the essence of post modernism. No one religion or moral value system is superior or to be deemed the final authority. Postmoderns want tolerance, but in their desire they too have become intolerant.

16 Wayne Cameron, The Chester Clipper ,Sept.2003.

Almost every view is to be tolerated, and by tolerance the postmodernist means to be accepted, the only exception being a view that insists upon its own absoluteness.¹⁷ “To the postmodernist any absolute truth is seen as an imposition of power on human beings. Thus, the authority of the church, the Bible, or the clergy must be thrown off. Truth and morality are simply what a community defines or agrees upon for the betterment of the community.”¹⁸ For the postmodern human community is also more important than the individual. Truth is determined by the collective, not from the outside.

There are also a number of characteristics in postmodern thinking that influence the preacher. Postmoderns have had it with religion, even their commitment is short termed. Having had it with religion is to mean that postmoderns say they do not like or desire “organized religion,” a religion with rules and theological absolutes, a religion that is inclusive and politically correct. Post modernism is a choice culture, so God is a “do-it-your-self” creation open to all options. There is a lack of any sense of sinfulness and distinction between faith and superstition.

Erickson points out a couple of positive elements of postmodernism. “One of postmodernism’s helpful and correct insights is that it is not possible to be absolutely certain about any system of thought. This would mean that the

¹⁷Erickson, 17.

¹⁸Ibid., 68.

postmodern thinker would be open to what the preacher might have to say to his or her spiritual journey. Secondly, the postmodernists have correctly pointed out that all of our knowledge is conditioned. All of our experience, all that we have been exposed to in life, affects our judgment. Our attitudes are affected and structured by our experiences. Our own presuppositions, or what we carry about with us, affect our understanding of the thoughts of others.”¹⁹

It is this world that the modern preacher faces. To quote Frederick Buechner’s warning, “The stakes have never been higher.”

Where many preachers rail against the influence of postmodernism, we are faced with the question, “How do we preach to a post modern reality?” Let us take an example from the past. In the late 1800's Hudson Taylor went to China to bring Christianity to that great unevangelized nation. In explaining his vision Taylor had a hard time explaining to his mission board that he wanted to do ministry differently than “the English way,” the way they expected. Taylor let his hair grow out, changed to local dress code, and learned the language of the people. Taylor immersed himself in the culture, to come to an understanding of the minds to which he was called to minister. Biblical communication to a post modern culture should be approached in the same way that a missionary goes into a foreign culture. No missionary worth his or her salt would enter a field without first doing an exhaustive

¹⁹Ibid., 89-91.

study of the culture he or she seeks to reach. The time has come for today's preachers to don the missionary garb.²⁰

Our culture can be comparable to the one occupied by Augustine. He stood at the point where the classical vision had lost its power over people's minds and society was disintegrating. He was the one who formulated for the Western half of Christendom a vision based on the twin dogmas of Trinity and Incarnation. Augustine lived through a twilight time. Old Rome passed away right before his eyes. As he gazed ahead toward the future, he knew that western civilization hung in an uncertain balance. Augustine understood his times and he realized that the church needed a cogent Christian worldview. His historical influence is so great because his thinking provided the foundation for western Christian society for centuries. If Augustine were alive today, he would again be busy developing a Christian worldview for the postmodern age.

The worldview that may reach the postmodern can still be found in the scriptures, not in the absolutes but in the story. We live in a day and age where people do not know the Bible. They do not know the big stories. A whole generation has grown up without Sunday School or any religious education. Most people have not read or even seen a Bible. This is not a negative for the post modern preacher, but a starting point. There is today a great opportunity to preach the great truths and stories of the Bible to those who have never heard. Stories that, if told afresh in new ways under the power of the Holy Spirit, will bring fire to the hearts and minds

²⁰Johnson, 10.

of postmodern, pre-Christian peoples.

Preaching in a postmodern world has its challenges. Preaching to a postmodern reality is like playing “pin the tail on the donkey.” A scarf has been draped over our eyes. Someone has turned us silly and then challenged us to pin our sermons on the right end of the donkey. But when we try to do so, we cannot understand all the laughter around us. In our minds, we’re convinced where the donkey is. Yet, when we take off our scarf, we see our sermon hanging there, limp and on the wrong wall!

The preacher is called to rethink the sermon, reinvent the delivery, re-emerge in the postmodern culture to preach a real message to real people. To preach to a postmodern reality does not mean to reject postmodernism, but to embrace it in such a way that the word of God will come alive and be received by a new generation of pre-Christian hearers.

Postmodern people reject objective truth. So it becomes the joy of the preacher to learn how to apply the truth of God’s word in a subjective way. People today want to encounter the Divine, not simply learn abstract principles about the Divine. To preach to a postmodern subjective audience, it will be incumbent to find new methods to get the message out. “For to preach is to communicate the truth of God’s Word in a way that the recipients can understand in their culture.”²¹

For example, historical illustrations don’t connect to the post modern, who is more interested in seeing if this stuff works for the speaker than in hearing a tear-

²¹Rod Martoia, Great Preaching (Grand Rapids: Group, 2003) 118.

jerking Civil War story. “Real, raw, genuine, and authentic” are the modern connections postmoderns make.

This fall I took a group of young people to hear a sixty-four year old man relate his story. The church was packed to overflowing with young people. He held the hearers spellbound for more than an hour. Sitting up front I watched his expressions, movement, eye contact, and his use of words. He spoke with passion in words that were filled with feeling and emotion. The authority, life changing message of Nicky Cruz has not changed in thirty plus years, for the message was raw, genuine and authentic. This is a type of preaching postmoderns are open too, a message that is incarnational, that lives in front of them as the sermon is preached to them. “Illustrations from real life are not additional niceties that help postmoderns understand, they are real life and they are the message; they’re fleshed out truth, not abstract propositions.”²²

Postmoderns have been shaped by the way they have received information. Information is not only verbal but visual. We have a couple of generations of people who have grown up with technology that demands that the communication of the message have some degree of modern communication technology. To preach in a postmodern reality will demand the use of sound systems, projectors with multi media display capabilities and quality presentations that are appealing to the learning senses. Preaching will also mean finding a variety of ways to deliver the message and different ways of communicating the message within the context of

²²Ibid. 127.

the worship service. The key to imaginative impact is to frame the old story in new terms.

Postmodern seekers are not content to sit and listen to sermons: they want to be interactive. Drama, music, and art are finding places of power and prominence in the postmodern worship service. The objective truth of the Word of God can come alive in a variety of experiences for the postmodern worshiper.

Chapter Two

Preaching to a Visual Culture

There is no denying that we live in “the information age.” Information has been passed along by the use of the Roman road system, which was the single most important means of spreading the gospel throughout the first century. The invention of moveable type, the printing press revolutionized the way the world passed along views, news and ideas. Centuries later, with the invention of the telegraph and the telephone, written information was transferred to auditory and voice communication. “In our modern culture new technology has shifted the way we process information. We have shifted from a word-oriented to an image-oriented style of communication. The most influential invention in our culture is the television.”¹

Modern culture has a love affair with the television. Ninety eight percent of homes have a television; 64 percent have two or more. On the average the television runs 29.5 hours per week in the home. On Monday April 5, 2004 The Chronicle Herald published an article from The Associated Press by Lindsay Tanner with the caption, “TV could be rewiring young brains.” The article cites a study that suggests that children aged 1 to 3 face increased risk of attention problems, with the possibility of having trouble thinking about critical issues and ideas. Within the first three years of life the brain is being wired for

¹ Richard J. Vincent, Preaching in the Television Age www.theocentric.com/original/preachingtv. Nov. 1, 2003 1.

life and if television is the main means of stimulation for the brain problems can occur.²

In our visual culture the television receives a great amount of authority. It is usually found in a prominent location in homes. Its very location exhibits authority. Timothy Turner in his book, Preaching to a Programmed People states that there are measurable statistics proving television consumption has hindered the ability to read. He states that “the word always takes second place to the image.” The person sitting in front of the television flips through the channels not listening for tasty dialogue but looking for the most visually stimulating image.³

“Our culture is dominated by communication technology that provides neither exposition, understanding, nor information. TV has made entertainment the focus in presenting experience, and it has shaped its own kind of audience..... The obvious response to this culture trend for the preacher is that sermons are to be short, narrative, affective, and non-propositional. However, true biblical preaching, even when it is primarily narrative in structure, must be propositional at its core.”⁴ Images must be tied to proposition as a tool of proclamation.

Preaching to a visually wired culture will be difficult for a number of reasons. Image has replaced words, and images have the possibility of being false. Turner argues “that people trained on television will generally not have the

2 Lindsay Tanner The Chronical Herald April 5, 2004.

3 Ibid., 2

4 John Koessler. “A View from the Pew: Lessons About Preaching from the Other Side of the Pew.” Preaching (July-August, 1996) 20-22.

patience or skills in learning to discern between true and false ideas, for an image-oriented medium like television does not promote critical analysis, evaluation, or reflection.”⁵ “If our parishioners listen to us with the same attitude with which they listen to the evening news, then we will be plagued with people who think they have done their part by simply listening – a dangerous position to be in, in light of Scripture’s repeated condemnation of mere hearers.”⁶

“Think about it” says Turner. “When was the last time you saw anything on TV that demanded action? ...Information requiring no response fosters idleness and passivity and results in “brain dead” listeners. They have already decided to do nothing about what there going to hear before they even begin to listen.”⁷ If television bypasses critical thought, then television is primarily entertainment that evokes feelings and expectation of pleasure, a place where reality becomes indistinguishable from the real world.

Another problem will be the inability of our younger generation to read and communicate properly with words. Looking over my son’s shoulder as he talked or communicated by computer through an instant messaging service called MSN, I could not read the message that was being sent to him by a classmate and I could not read his reply. Every word was shortened to letters, symbols or jargon. He ended his transmission with the letters “gtg”. Inquiring as to what the letters meant I received a look of disbelief as he said, “Got to Go.”

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

Neil Postman argues that in an electronic culture the image replaces the word. Several serious consequences result. First, it brings about the pseudo event and the pseudo content, “events” formed from images that have no actual referents in the world of everyday. Second, “knowing” becomes a “knowing about” instead of the “knowing of”; that is, one knows about the fact of hunger in, say, India, but there is no critical understanding of it in terms of an analysis of its causes or the complexities of its political and economic dynamics or the depth of the difficulty of addressing it. Third, electronic imagery has amnesia about the past, believing history is irrelevant, fascinating us instead with its instancy, while offering no complexity or coherence. In this sense it becomes a decontextualized imagery. Fourth, is specialty as performance, not ideas, and it presents image, not argument. Fifth, Postman argues that media is the dominant influence in the formation of a culture’s intelligence and social preoccupations. While media often seem innocent enough, it has powerful consequences in the “definition of reality.” Finally, Postman sees media as metaphors that have the capacity to influence a wide variety of attitudes and experiences; that is, media can go far beyond the immediate context to shape the culture in ways not anticipated.⁸

Words have been replaced by the visual as we have seen with the popularity of the music video and MTV. Boomers were influenced by sound and especially the sound of the beat. Grossberg writing in the early nineties, observed that “the ratio of sight and sound has already changed significantly. For the first time since the early 1960s, television has successfully constructed a youth audience...displacing sound as the focus of generational identification, differentiation, investment and occasionally even authenticity.”⁹ There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence to support Grossberg’s claim. A ten-year-old

⁸ Tex Sample, The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 23

gets off a subway in New York city and asks a friend, "Have you *seen* the latest Michael Jackson song? Some now maintain that we should no longer call young people teenagers but "screenagers" .¹⁰ How many times does a parent or grandparent wait for their teenagers to arrive so that they might program the VCR or show them some shortcut on the computer?

The evidence goes well beyond the anecdotal. According to a recent study there is a marked difference between people born before World War II and those born after. The survey reports that "the percentage of 18 to 24 year olds who read novels, short stories, poetry, and plays in the previous year" dropped 7 percent between 1982 and 1992. Yet, this practice declined only 2 percent among middle aged adults or Boomers, but remained stable with adults 50 years old or more. Among young adults 41 percent did not read a single book not required for school or work in the last twelve months, and 60 percent read four or less."¹¹

At the same time, visual activities increased in participation. Among 18 to 24 years old, 29 percent report visits to art museums or galleries in 1992 compared to 23 percent in 1982, and TV and video dealing with art are up from 18 percent to 26 percent in these same years. This increase is all the more interesting since formal arts education in school is down from 41 percent to 24 percent in this ten year period.¹² Our younger generation is moving away from the normal reading practices of their parents and grandparents, to reading what

31 Ibid
10 Ibid., 47.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.

is available on a screen. The screen has become a means of interaction and multi-dimensional for our “screenage” generation.

Therefore, we live in a visual culture. What is culture? When we think of culture as Christians we often think culture is what the New Testament called “the world.” Michael Quicke states that “this may be too narrow in definition, too naïve in our hopes and especially as preachers, too unclear in our understanding about the impact of communication shifts within culture change.”¹³

The word “culture” may be used in many contexts, sometimes very local, to characterize attitudes and behavior. H. Richard Niebuhr, in Christ and Culture argued that “culture” should be regarded as a wide concept, indeed it should be as inclusive as the term “civilization.” It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes and values.¹⁴

Our visual culture has caught the preacher between two worlds. The modern world perceived preaching as reasoned, systematic, analytical, individualistic and verbal. A past generation came to church with their Bibles in hand and took notes. They understood the logical format of the sermon usually in point form. The preaching of the Word of God was central to their worship experience. The logical format was important to preaching the word because preaching appeals to left brain thinking. The left brain (really the left

13 Michael Quicke, “Technologizing of the Word – Flight, Fight or Befriend?” Preaching. Vol.18, No. 1 July-August 2002, 4.

14 H.Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture New York: Harper and Row. 1951 32.

hemisphere) is responsible for logical and linear thought. We learn languages, math, and sequential thinking with the left side of our brains. But when it comes to using visual aids in the delivery of the sermon it has been suggested that the creative part of the brain is the “right side” or “right brain.” The right brain (the right hemisphere) is more sense-oriented and is responsible for our orientation in space, artistic endeavors, body image, and recognition of faces. The right brain is relational, intuitive, and feeling oriented. Reality is that some people do think, assimilate ideas, and experience the world more through the right brain and others through the left brain. The advantage in preaching is to reach the whole brain, using multi media, audio visual, sight and sound. When both sides of the brain are being used the person in the pew listens to a “stereo communication.”

In our postmodern world we have shifted towards communication that includes mystery, community and symbol. People come to church today expecting to be edified by the preaching and experiencing the presence of God through the worship. Worship is defined as what happens in the sacred hour. Worship services include reading the Bible, prayers, hymns, spiritual songs, choruses and preaching. Many worship services may include dance, drama, and drums.

Our postmodern generation desires experience as well as exhortation through exposition. The visual culture has become used to preaching that has been edited for time and impact. The postmodern listener puts tremendous

pressure on the pastor to live up to the image they have watched on television just an hour before coming to church.

We also have to face the fact that deconstructionism is a centerpiece of postmodernity. Associated with Jacques Derrida in the 1970's, this is a theory about language and the phenomenon of understanding itself which claims that words have no objective content. "The only 'reality' words have is what they create in our minds as we use them." So, deconstructionists can argue that God can have no existence independent of language. Words express opinions each of which has equal validity.¹⁵

With the phenomenon of deconstructionism, communication of the Bible has become a new challenge. The preacher must learn how to give proper meaning to words that a past generation understood without explanation. Along with Biblical languages which help to interpret the text the preacher must learn to handle the language of his listeners. The preacher must be aware of Christian jargon and how it effectively will shut down his listeners. Words need to be explained to a visual culture which define many words by image and not meaning. A "hard drive" for a senior saint is a bumpy road, a "hard drive" for a teenager is a computer component on which they store their down loaded music. A woman in my church bought her husband a Christmas present, which she thought was a new kind of mouse trap. Her grandchildren roared with laughter Christmas morning, when it was revealed that she in fact bought her husband a mouse pad used on a computer table. The visual culture has turned words into images and in preaching we must turn images into words.

In a visual culture many preachers see the need, or are pressured to move towards the newest technology to help in the delivery of their sermons. Television has conditioned the viewer to a fast pace of moving images and continuous action. Video games, internet communication and digital phones with continually upgraded features have made preaching seem slow and antiquated. So the call is for preaching to come of age and make use of the media available.

Jesus and Paul often used visual aids of their day to get the message across to their hearers. Jesus used a child to teach the disciples about simple faith. He pictured the flight of the sparrow to teach the disciples about the providential care of God. He used everyday objects like seed, wood, hay, water, light, to teach the disciples and in His preaching to the crowds. Jesus' parables were beautifully painted word pictures or allegories to create images. The Apostle Paul used the statues on Mars Hill to introduce His God to the people of Athens. There are numerous verses that demonstrate the Bible's use of images:

- “It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)
- “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17)
- “And take ...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph. 6:17)
- “Let the word of Christ dwell within you...” (Col.3:16)

15 Quick, 7.

- “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).
- “Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” (1 Peter 2:2)

In light of our commitment to the centrality of the word, we must learn to preach to a programmed people without sacrificing the priority of the words. “We must always remember that in TV words are secondary but in preaching they are everything.”¹⁶ In preaching words are what paint the images that on the heart and mind.

Today in the church preachers are using overhead projectors, movie clips, Power Point computer software and multi media projectors as tools in preaching. A church that uses video to its full capacity is in North Coast Church in Vista, California, pastored by Larry Osborne. He developed a concept called “video café.” It started in 1998 as an overflow room. Osborne contacted Starbucks to provide coffee, and with tables and greenery, to create an atmosphere like a café. The Video Café became a worship of choice for many of his members in their twenties and thirties. While the attendees of Video Café stood at tables drinking coffee they could watch and listen to their pastor preach in a large screen. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, said his church’s future is in the Cineplex concept, multiple venues and worship styles, where attendees

¹⁶ Vincent. 4.

are never late because a service, with its videotaped sermon, is always about to start somewhere. Willow Creek has gone to a multi campus concept with the use of video. Willow Creek style churches have moved off campus to other communities. Worship is conducted by the worship team but when it comes time for the sermon everyone looks up to the screen where the message is delivered by Bill Hybels. There are some church leaders who see the day when a local preacher is not needed in the church. The ministry will be done by a lay pastor and the preaching will be done by simulcasts or video.¹⁷

So what does preaching look like today? Four forms are present.

1. Conjoined congregations: one church, meeting simultaneously in two or more locations, share the preachers live by video. This is being done at Brunswick Street Baptist Church in Fredericton, New Brunswick. In the main sanctuary a formal service takes place with a traditional worship style led by the Senior Pastor. Some meters away in the gym a contemporary service is being held led by a worship team. At a predetermined time the preacher gets up to preach in the sanctuary and at the same time there is a projection of the preacher on a large screen.
2. Video Cafes: multiple congregations of one church, meeting at different times on the main campus, often with different worship styles, watch the same preacher on recorded video.
3. Satellite congregations: multiple congregations, still controlled by the mother church but operating on remote campuses, watch recorded sermons of preaching at the main campus.
4. The preacher-less church: An independent congregation that uses recorded sermons from another ministry, while providing its own worship, leadership, programming and governance.¹⁸

In a recent Breakpoint commentary, Chuck Colson cited a couple of examples of ways in which technology is driving churches: "A congregation was

¹⁷ Eric Reed, "Let's go to the Tape." *Leadership*. Spring 2003, 77.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

faced with a financial dilemma. They had just installed a very expensive, high-end audio and video system for their church sanctuary and were way over budget. To solve the problem, the congregation decided to lay off one of its two pastors. Technology, they were forced to conclude, had a higher priority than pastoral care. In another congregation, the pastoral staff no longer makes decisions about what to preach. Instead the authority goes to the technologists who run the high-tech worship. Their ability to get images to project during the service dictates the preaching topics. Michael Duduit says, "I am an advocate of using technology as a tool to more effectively communicate in this visual-driven age. Nevertheless, even with a good tool, there are always dangers. In a quest to be "cutting edge," some churches may be cutting the wrong things. Colson points citing Quentin Shultze's new book High Tech Worship?, that "if we're not careful, worship through technology can become mechanical, calculated and packaged to meet spiritual and religious needs." When that happens, technology robs us of true worship.¹⁹

Shultze goes on to say, "There is a deep held belief in America: Money buys technology, which can improve just about everything.' Yet technology doesn't improve just about everything. It does change just about everything, for it is not neutral. Technology changes the way we view the world, and when used in worship, it can change the way we view God, ourselves and our faith. Technology must always be a means, not an end."²⁰

19 Michel Duduit. www.michaelduduit.com Preaching Now Vol.3. 15.
20 Ibid.

Before we sell ourselves to use of multimedia communication we must be careful that the medium does not become the message. If so, the preaching of the sermon which is an oral communication becomes secondary to the visual presentation. The power of God can become replaced with Power Point or video. McDill reminds us, "The twenty-first century preachers would do well, however, to consider the power of simple oral communication before forsaking it for audio visual aids."²¹

Philip Brooks wrote in 1889 that preaching is "truth through personality." He explained his meaning, "Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching."²² The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his lips, not merely into his understanding and through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him. I think that, granting equal intelligence and study, here is the great difference which we feel between true preachers of the Word.

What Brooks is describing is "Incarnational Preaching." "Removing personality from Brook's definition of preaching is to remove something essential, but the electronic media is prone to do just that. Pixels and disembodied words on a screen are the media of the day, but a flesh and blood person is the medium of preaching." Today's listeners need to see God's message embodied in the whole life of the preacher. ²³

21 McDill, 15

22 Ibid.

23 Jeffery D. Arthurs and Ben Jackson. Preaching in the Electronic Age Evangelical Homiletics Society Meetings. 2001. 8.

The question arises “if preaching is face to face and incarnational should the preacher use audio-visual means to communicate in preaching?”²⁴ The answer is “yes” but with extreme caution. Yes, only if the audio-visual is used to enhance the message and is secondary to the sermon and its delivery by the preacher. Just as Jesus used “media” such as writing in the dirt, bread and wine, and the birds of the air when he taught a “primary orality” audience, so we should use media as we address the people of “secondary orality.” Pictures can be used to connect with people who think in pictures, but let us remember that the most clear “picture” is the personality of the preacher conveyed earnestly and sincerely through words and deeds.²⁵

Preaching to a postmodern world which is highly visual, it is important to use visual language in preaching. Preaching is a verbal art and therefore preachers should conjure images in the minds of their listeners. Preaching today will have to be narrative in its presentation with concrete examples, vivid illustrations and stories. Images that are planted in the mind through the use of words are more complete than images on the screen. Arthurs and Jackson cite Buttrick’s caution concerning images, “without a logical structure in which these images can form, occur, and mean, they aren’t going to do much for you. They are simply going to be images which don’t provoke contemplation.”²⁶

Preachers who try to remain true to the ideal of proclamation while still using visual language, must work overtime to ensure images communicate ideas.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid 9.

26 Ibid. 10.

In our visual culture that idolizes Hollywood the preacher can take advantage of images to preach the gospel. “That is why preachers should follow Paul’s example on Mars Hill by taking what people worship and lead them to Christ.”²⁷

For anyone wanting to reject the use of images in preaching, there are plenty of writers willing to support them. In a previous article in “Preaching”, David Larsen laments the lowered status of the text, arguing that when the text of Scripture is in decline, preaching loses its “edge.” He writes, “The contemporary preference for image over ideas must be challenged at its root; images without ideas are vapid and vacuous impressions to be wrecked on the shoals of subjectivity.”²⁸ Newman reminds us, “We walk through a culture awash in images, many as idolatrous as the Athenians. But if we care for the people who produce and consume these images, can we do less than Paul?”²⁹

“The key to the use of media images in preaching is not exclusion but hierarchy. Images must serve the text or they are of no value. Here we need to be careful that we don’t use images as a substitute for content. Beautiful PowerPoint slides and captivating video may leave congregations in awe of your technical prowess, but scratching their heads as to the meaning of the message.” Images cannot rescue a poorly prepared sermon, but they can certainly make a good one better.³⁰

27 Marc T. Newman. *From Mars Hill to the Movies Preaching*: Vol.19,Nu.5 (March-April 2004) 25.

28 David Larson. *The Decline of the Text Preaching*: Vo. 18, No.5 (March-April 2003) 27-28.

29 Newman, 25.

30 Larson, 28.

Not having “high tech” available I used “low tech” one Sunday as an aid in the preaching of the message. I used an “overhead projector.” I preached my sermon from the sanctuary floor abandoning the pulpit. As I preached I would make my point readable by putting it on the screen at the front of the church. The experiment went according to plan. Four point sermon, four points written on the overhead transparency. Only one person, a very well educated person remarked at the door, “Pastor, that was very interesting way to present your sermon. I enjoyed seeing your points on the overhead. It was a good teaching tool, but it distracted me from your preaching.” I learned quickly that preaching is more than words. She taught me that the focus of preaching is not only the word projected by the sound of the voice, but by the other physical elements of the preacher’s body as he or she stands before the congregation.

Newman states, “The best preaching is already visual. The purpose of parable or allegory is to create an image. When people can imagine the outworking of a story – if they can see how the biblical principle works or applies to them – the preaching leaves the realm of the abstract and finds a place in their lives. Unfortunately, not all preachers are gifted storytellers. Carefully reasoned expository preaching that incorporates professionally crafted drama can create a lasting impression.”³¹ Illustrations should not take the place of good expository preaching, they can and should support it.

One of the means used today in many churches is the video clip. The clip is used as an illustrative tool. The video clip does bring interest especially to

31 Ibid., 25.

a culture that is used to seeing and using video as a teaching tool. Some caution needs to be taken when using video in preaching. Use no more than a couple of clips in any sermon. One should be an opener and the other a closer. How does placement in the message affect the way clips are used? There are only three places where clips can be incorporated into a message – the introduction, the conclusion, or in support of a particular point in the body of the sermon. Clips for an introduction need to encompass the sweep of the sermon – but they do not have to be positive in tone. They can also not afford to be lengthy. Imagine opening a sermon on greed. “The actor Michael Douglas stands in a room filled with beautiful furniture, his hair is slicked back making him look slick and evil. In the movie Wall Street, he appears as Gekko and thunders out the words, “Greed is Good.” It is moving and it resonates. It may even illuminate the hearts of some in the congregation. What a great setup to a discussion of the sin of greed.³²

Clips for a conclusion can also be lengthy, but they must reinforce the thrust of the sermon. You should choose clips that mirror the sermon’s tone and content. “Ending a sermon on the Prodigal Son, or the parable of the lost sheep, one might end with a clip from the film Finding Nemo. The children would be caught up in the message. In one scene Nemo – a clown fish captured by divers, who is now on display in a dentist’s office – despairs of ever escaping and rejoining his father, Marlin. Just when things are at their worst, a pelican appears on the office windowsill. He begins to recount for Nemo all of the dangers that Marlin has gone through to come to Nemo’s rescue. In fact,

³² Ibid.

Marlin is in the bay just outside the office window. The recognition of his father's love motivates Nemo in his struggle to escape his captivity and get back home."³³

In the middle of a sermon, lengthy film clips can be distracting, and any clips should be used sparingly. For example, in support of a sermon point on renewing the mind, setting the mind on Christ, or the rewards of self-control, there is a moving clip from the movie *A Beautiful Mind*. "The film chronicles the story of John Nash, a brilliant mathematics professor who overcame his battle with mental illness by committing himself to a "diet of the mind," avoiding entertaining those thoughts that would trigger his illness. The careful, and sparing, use of video clips increases their impact on a congregation."³⁴

The last issue concerns the use of film clips: should they be used before or after a truth claim? Preachers should introduce a claim first, and then illustrate it with an example. The parables of Christ sometimes follows this pattern of propositional truth followed by illustration. Teaching what is true is often not enough to move people to change their minds or behavior. "The idea that human beings are strictly rational creatures is a myth, as many counseling pastor know. People are unlikely to act until they are emotionally moved. Dramatizations can take the rational claim and add to it passionate motivation. Tell people the truth, and then motivate them to live it out."³⁵

When it comes to preaching to a visual culture we are challenged to meet the desire to be heard and seen. We may want to strike a balance but I believe

³³ Ibid., 26.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

that anything that is not well prepared and necessary to enhance the preaching of the word must be discarded. To use the visual in preaching because it is trendy is not acceptable. It will be thought of as gimmicky, distracting from the preaching.

Chapter Three

Preaching and Imagination

Preaching in a postmodern world with its highly technical communication resources will challenge the preacher in the use of his or her imagination in the creation and the delivery of the sermon.

Elizabeth Achtemeier says,

For creative preaching is the fashioning of a sermon into such an artistic and effective whole that the Word of God, spoken through the text, is allowed to create that reality of which it speaks within the individual and corporate lives of the gathered congregation. Creative preaching is the release of the active Word of God to do its judging and saving work. Creative preaching is the medium of the working of a present God within the lives of his people on any given Sunday morning.¹

Preaching is both theology and art. The preacher is not simply a technician, but a craftsman and an artist in the handling, ordering and expressing of God's truth. Henry Ward Beecher says, "The first element on which your preaching will largely depend for power and success, you will perhaps be surprised to learn, is imagination, which I regard as the most important of all elements that go to make the preacher."²

Preaching deals with so many abstract truths, therefore there is a great necessity to develop the creativity of the preacher. Imagination is an aspect of creativity that has to be considered and developed in the preacher. David

1 Elizabeth Achtemeier. Creative Preaching. (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1980) 11.

2 David L. Larsen. The Anatomy of Preaching. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1989) 108.

Larson writes, "Imagination nurtures impulses, flashes of insight and excitement over ideas; creativity is the result. To be genuinely creative, one must imagine."³

After many years of pastoral ministry and having preached countless sermons fear can grip the heart of the preacher if he or she becomes bored with his or her sermons. It is easy to get into a sermon style that over time becomes predictable and stale. The preacher must not despair but begin a learning process that will allow him or her to possess a creative imagination. Yes, we can learn to be more imaginative. Thomas H. Troeger writes:

The imagination is not purely capricious. If we analyze those moments of inspiration when our hearts and minds take fire, we discover that there are patterns of experience and reflection that encourage the imagination. The imaginative process can be compared to the art of sailing a boat: We cannot make the wind blow, but we can trim the sails and tend the helm. We cannot compel the Spirit to fill our imaginations with wind and fire, but we can practice those disciplines of prayer and thought that will open us to God's revelations.⁴

Troeger suggests the development of what he calls "imaginative theology." "Imaginative theology employs the visionary and integrative capacities of the mind to create theological understanding. It uses the powers of observation to become receptive to the Holy Spirit, who works upon our consciousness through patterns of association and juxtaposition."⁵ In his experience listening to hundreds of preachers he has formulated seven principles for the practice of imaginative theology.

³ Ibid. 109.

⁴ Thomas H. Troeger. Imagining a Sermon. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990) 14.

⁵ Ibid. 26.

1. Alert the eye to keener sight.
2. Feel the bodily weight of truth.
3. Listen to the music of speech.
4. Draw parables from life.
5. Understand the church's resistance to imagination.
6. Dream of new worlds.
7. Return to the Source.

The rules and norms for imaginative theology reflect various theories of the brain and psyche, such as the balance of left and right hemispheric thinking, which claims that we all have a dominant language system for processing reality – orally, visual or bodily. Troeger suggests that such theories may or may not be sustained by future research. “I believe that a more lasting basis for these rules and norms lies in the character of our being – namely, that we have been created to know, love, and serve God with all that we are, with heart and soul and mind and strength. That belief is the source of my conviction about imaginative theology.”⁶

From the great preachers of the past we learn that the use of imagination is important. “G. Campbell Morgan labels imagination as the supreme work in preparation of the sermon. John Ruskin taught that imagination works in three ways: it is penetrative, probing beneath the sensible surfaces; it is associative, for our purpose comparing spiritual with spiritual; it is contemplative. Andrew Blackwood also spoke of three kinds of imagination that are pertinent to

⁶ Ibid. 30.

preaching: descriptive – what’s there; constructive – what’s implied, and creative – what could be there.”⁷

People today live and learn in a visual world. When it comes to preaching the imagination must make words, ideas and principles into pictures. Aristotle maintained that the soul never thinks without pictures. People today are even more taken with images than with ideas. So how does the preacher develop a sanctified imagination?

The first step to understanding imagination is the revelation that the creative imagination comes from God. I agree with Dorothy L. Sayers who has described creativity in terms of the work of the Holy Trinity: “God the Father is the author of the creative idea; God the Son is the expression of the ideas through the consequent art forms of poem, painting, symphony, or sermon; God the Holy Spirit is responsible for communication to others.”⁸

Larson makes some classical suggestions for developing imagination. Memory has a great capacity for remembering a wide range of emotions, pictures, and ideas. He quotes William Blake “we are what we behold.” He also suggests that we follow after reading. Literature refines our sensibilities and nurtures our creative power. Practically he suggests that every preacher should have a systematic reading program with a balanced mix of many kinds of good material. He also suggests that in development of imagination that ample time

⁷ Larson. 110.

⁸ Ibid. 111.

be set aside for “creative brooding.” There must also be a desire for the careful use of words. Finally, he suggests that the preacher listen to great music.⁹

Craig Skinner, Professor of Preaching at Golden Gate Baptist Seminary describes the creative cycle in five activities.

1. Informing

This is the mind’s initial locating function concerning the topic or problem upon which the mental reflection is being undertaken. The basic essentials of its nature are thoroughly investigated, and the main areas of thought and directions of consideration are ascertained. During this process of collation every fact or idea considered is to be accepted without any judgment as to its relevance.

2. Exploring

A discernable second phase in creative thought is that of penetrative investigation of all the latent associations available between the facts and materials gathered under stage 1. An incredible variety of such potential relationships between the materials previously collated can develop here if the human mind’s creative capacity is totally freed to imagine possible combinations and even fresh connections. Through such a process we consider the concern in view from every potential perspective and think through all the possible ways in which it may be linked to other facts and ideas, expanded, developed, or applied.

In order to implement such a “brainstorming” function of exploration, the primary essential is a disciplined commitment to a nonjudgmental response to the suggestions thus generated. Unless such a discipline is rigorously applied, the ongoing process of imaginative creativity will certainly be truncated, and possibly entirely destroyed. Logical thought must be suspended in favor of the free association of ideas.

Creative invention is an extension of other ideas. As a wide variety of differing facts and concepts come into fresh associations with each other they create new offspring. These couplings breed original ideas which grow out of the fresh connections between the old ones. All the pieces of information gathered must be thrown against each other, and cast into as many connections as is possible. We note what breeds from their cohabitation, remaining open to accept any suggestion, recording everything, and deliberately refusing to reject anything no matter what its character may be.

⁹ Ibid. 114-117.

This exploration function must continue until all constructive thought has been explored. This can often produce feelings of anxiety, disappointment, and even fatigue, over the lack of final conclusions. Only when the frustration level of our exploring becomes almost unbearable should we move on to subsequent stages of the process. The heights of ecstasy experienced when the creative insights finally arrive bare a direct relation to the depths of agony experienced to this point. This struggle in exploration is like mining for gold. It takes a lot of work but when the nugget is discovered there is great joy and excitement.

3. Withdrawing.

The third step in the creative process appears for many to be both the strangest and most difficult. This demands a complete abandonment of the task and a total surrender of it to the inner creative self. A minimum of three to seven days should be set aside for the creative process to take place. The intention of this phase is to put the matter entirely out of the conscious mind and, through such chosen forgetfulness, to plant firmly in the subconscious where our natural creative capacities may function unhindered.

While attention focuses on other tasks – as you sleep, read, travel, fellowship, or talk – powers lodged in an inner basement of the mind labor on secretly. The stage of withdrawal acts as an incubator nourishing the creative life within, and it leads naturally into the next phase where insights tumble in. Larson called this “creative brooding.” It was in the moment of creative brooding before a fire that Rene Decartes formulated his idea of self awareness. Newton allegedly contemplated the apple before formulating the laws of gravity.¹⁰

4. Discovering.

Here spontaneous intuitive discernments commonly arrive as ecstatic “aha” experiences. A new insight may often leap into conscious awareness through a seemingly accidental coincidence. Often the things that come to mind have to be thought through in order to be come useful and acceptable for the sermon.

5. Verifying.

This phase is the development of the ideas through to a full development and application. In this phase facts are checked and verified. Then the hard work of crafting the idea for the best communication possible.¹¹

10 Larson. Page 116.

11 Craig Skinner. Creativity in Preaching. Handbook of Contemporary Preaching (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992) 565-568.

In order to discover how I might develop a more creative imagination my research led me to an understanding of how the brain works. “The “left brain” person is high functioning with verbal processing both in speech and writing. The person has the capacity for number skills of math and the sciences. Reasoning skills are logical and precise. The “Right Brain” person learns visually in random patterns. There is a great capacity for the arts and music. The right brain person usually has a creative imagination and communicates best by story telling.”¹²

Simply understanding that not everyone thinks alike helps the preacher process and present the sermon. Skinner, writes:

The left brain appears to gather and logically analyze facts and other raw data. Mathematical abilities appear to locate here, and this is the agency for the communication of our ideas. Information is processed sequentially, and then stored in connective banks which enable it to be recognized and recalled. Left brain functions seem strongest among scientists, and within similar rationally oriented minds.

Creative ideas appear to synthesize in the right brain. From a variety of inputs we determine the significance of the data gathered by the left brain as we consider it all holistically, and then distill the implications and inferences of all of which we have become aware. We make connections that extend the left brain’s factual information into areas of fresh relevance. This intuitive sensing leads to new perceptions and fresh insights. The right brain represents the emotional and imaginative side of the person which feels designs and creates. The right brain strength appears at highest levels among writers, artists, poets, musicians, and other very creative persons.

¹² Marlene D. LeFever. Learning Styles. (Paris: David C. Cook Publishing Co. 1995) 211.

In order to function in the fullness of our humanity we must use the cognitive, rational functions of the left brain. Yet we equally need the intuitive and creative connections of synthesized insight which flow from the right.¹³

Hollinger's and Skinner's description of thinking answered a lot of questions concerning my own ability to think and imagine. Throughout my education I always knew that I did not learn as others did. It was not until my final year of studies that it was discovered that my learning orientation was right brain.

This came to light after struggling to learn New Testament Greek for the third time. I was tested by the Education Department of Acadia University, and through this testing it was agreed that I was not orientated toward left brain thinking, which gives a person an aptitude for languages. This research has given me new freedom in the development of my preaching style. The sermon style that best fits my learning and communicating skills is built around imagination and story telling whether the sermon is structured inductively or deductively.

In Preaching with Imagination, Elizabeth Achtemeier reminds the preacher that the very first step in the discipline of learning to be a preacher is that of mastering basic English usage. Every sentence, every paragraph must be absolutely clear. "It has pleased God through the folly of the message we preach to save those who believe." She continues, "those who know how to write well are very often those who express themselves well in a sermon." This gives

13 Craig Skinner. "Creativity in Preaching." Handbook of Contemporary Preaching. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992) 564.

validity to the idea that a preacher should spend time creatively preparing a sermon by the use of a full written manuscript even if the manuscript is not taken to the pulpit.¹⁴

As preachers we must remember that preaching is an oral communication and that messages are received by sight and sound. Words are the preacher's instrument and the study of language is important. I remember hearing Dr. E.V. Hill describe his conversion while walking on a West Texas dirt road. It was upon that road that he surrendered to Christ. His words were so vivid that now some fifteen years later I can see him as a ten year old boy, barefoot, kneeling on that old dirt road receiving Christ. We can learn much when we listen to preachers who speak with imagination and have a good command of language.

Achtemeier challenges the preacher to read widely, go to plays, movies, and come to an understanding of various media expressions, in order to learn the fine art of communication.¹⁵

An approach to preaching that I have developed and have found very effective is what I call "retelling the scriptures." In almost every sermon I retell the context of the passage. I find that for many people simply reading the scripture before the sermon does not always set up the sermon. In the retelling of scripture having a vivid imagination is helpful. The preacher with the use of words without religious jargon transports the hearer from the pew into the word picture encouraging the listener to use his or her own imagination.

14 Achtemeir. 30.

15 Ibid. 34

Another area of preaching where the imagination comes into play is humor. Humour can make or break a sermon in a culture where humor has become an art form in the world of entertainment. There are two poles of thinking when it comes to the use of humour in preaching. There are preachers who think that there is no place for humour in preaching. At the opposite end of the spectrum I have heard preachers use humour in such a way that the sermon is nothing but a series of jokes, coarse jesting, and innuendo.

The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Baptist Confession of Faith 1689, give warning to those who use humour without regard to the seriousness of preaching the Word.

The light of nature shows that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is just, good and doth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in and served, with all the heart and all the soul and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.¹⁶

Scripture speaks both negatively and positively about laughter. Ecclesiastes 3:4 tells us that there “is a time to weep and a time to laugh.” (NIV). Ecclesiastes 2:2 Solomon tells us “laughter is foolishness.” Jesus said, “Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.” (Luke 6:21 NIV) These words of Christ indicate that those who pursue laughter as an end in itself and indulge

¹⁶ Samuel E. Waldon. A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1989) 264.

in godless pursuits to fulfill the objective may do so with regret. But he also promises laughter as a future blessing to those who are remorseful and repentant. Positively Psalm 126:2 (NIV) says, "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy." Here we see a connection between laughter and joy inasmuch as laughter may be an audible expression of joy. We who believe in Jesus are filled with this inexpressible joy. 1 Peter 1:8 (NIV) states: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

A warning must be sounded that, "Inappropriate levity is incongruous with the solemn nature of preaching but that does not mean there is no place at all for humour."¹⁷ Beville further writes

I am neither complimenting those who use humor nor criticizing those who do not. There is no biblical warrant for it and that is sufficient reason to be cautious. One should not always indulge his sense of humor. Funny things may enter the preacher's mind but he needs to exercise discretion and put them aside because they may be a distraction. If preaching promotes edification and humor promotes enjoyment they need not, necessarily, be viewed as polarized extremes. "We must continue to see the Sunday service as a 'hallowed hour' rather than 'happy hour' but healthy and honorable humor may have a place with a mature preacher who is comfortable with his congregation. He is best placed to harmonize the holiness and happiness of God's people."¹⁸

¹⁷ Kieran Beville. Does Humor Have A Place In Preaching? Preaching. January – February 2004. 37.

¹⁸ Ibid, 38.

Not every preacher has the ability to use humour in preaching. Some people have a well developed ability to perceive and express humour whereas others do not. Many preachers struggle with the use of humour. The preacher may tend to shy away from humour because of the inability of communicating using correct timing or the inability to tell a joke. Beville believes, “when using humour in preaching, must be very sensitive and avoid trivializing truth. He must always avoid merely entertaining the congregation. Humor should not be used to create a mood or climate of receptivity for the message. Neither should it be implied as a dramatic interlude to provide comic relief from the serious intent of the sermon. Truth is not to be trifled with!”¹⁹

Beville’s caution comes from his belief in the serious work of preaching. For him preaching is essentially about explaining and proclaiming the truth of God’s word. The glory of God is paramount in preaching for Beville. Thus he questions the role of humour in the preaching moment. For him “humour is like a very potent spice and ought to be used sparingly; otherwise it may spoil the spiritual food of the day.”²⁰

On the other hand David Rees, Pastor of the Church by the Sea, United Church of Christ, Bal Harbor, Florida writes, “Preachers without a sense of humour are apt to be like those who mow the grass at cemeteries – they have lots of people under them, but nobody is paying them any attention.”²¹

He goes on to say, “if you do not convey joy in your demeanor and gestures and speech, you will not be authentic witness for Jesus Christ. Delight

19 Ibid. page 36.

20 Ibid. page 39.

21 David Rees, Bring Serious about Humor. The Clergy Journal. Vol. LXXIII. No.4 Feb. 1997. 4.

in what God is doing is essential in our work.”²² I would whole heartedly agree. I have experienced great joy in preaching the word of God, yet, I struggle with the place of humour in preaching.

The Latin root for the word “humor” is *umor*, which means “fluid,” like water. Humor, then, keeps us fluid and flexible, allowing us to face the incongruities of life. Humor is a counterbalance. It has always been an expression of the freedom of the human spirit – our ability to stand outside of life and view the whole scene. Humor helps us to step back and see things in a different way. It gives us a fresh eye, allowing us to see things sideways, backward, upside down, and inside out. Humor also allows us to look at ourselves with a wider perspective. It gives us a multidimensional view or, as someone put it, humor provides “a God’s eye view” of life.²³

Rees says, “Humor teaches us that we are not as smart as we think. Humor takes up arms against serious and autocratic pretensions. We laugh, and in laughing become more human and humane. A well developed sense of humor allows us to see that we are all interconnected.”²⁴ It is in this interconnectedness that humor can be appropriate. I have found humor to be useful to connect with the congregation. To bring people to a place where they begin to focus on the purpose of preaching, which is the presentation of the word of God.

I believe Rees is correct by saying,

We live in an entertainment age. If we do not find a way to keep our sermons interesting, people will tune us out or flip to another mental channel.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid. 5.

24 Ibid.

Effective preachers balance substance with style; they are both serious and humorous. Research shows that people learn when they're in a state of moderate arousal. Incorporating humor into our preaching is a perfect way to create and maintain that state. It can enhance our preaching and get people to listen more attentively and remember longer. The effective use of humor unlocks a congregation's receptivity; it also provides a memory hook for important information. An old Chinese proverb helps us to understand how a memory hook works: "Tell me and I'll forget it; show me and I will remember; involve me and I'll understand. Humor involves both the preacher and the congregation."²⁵

It has been discussed earlier in this chapter that to possess an imagination in preaching one must be a creative person. Preachers with a sense of humor are very observant. "Humor is based on observing and examining reality. Through observational humor, there is the use of extremes and exaggerations to bring out the humor of common everyday situations."²⁶

The tension for many preachers in the use of humor is captured in this statement by Rees: "The paradox experienced by many preachers; they value humor personally and yet question its use in serious contexts, like preaching. This is due to what humorist Joel Goodman calls a basic "mythconception," namely, that people won't take us seriously if we use humor."²⁷

He goes on to say that humor is the best way to bridge the gap between the perfection we seek and the imperfections we need to live with. A sense of humor can add an important touch of humanity to our ministry and our preaching. He believes that most people evaluate a good preacher as someone who makes

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

the sermon easy to listen to and, therefore, memorable. And the use of humor often makes all the difference.²⁸

Rees believes humor serves preaching in four important ways:

1. It establishes rapport with the congregation, putting the preacher on friendly terms with his or her listeners.
2. Humor helps to make a serious point. Woven into the fabric of a sermon, humor can be a very effective means of directing attention to an important point or idea.
3. Humor serves as emotional counterpoint. It supplies relief from emotional tension and serious concentration. It is a change of pace. It puts things in perspective.
4. Humor often provokes laughter with another purpose in mind. Most forms of humor comprise playfulness, incongruity, and surprise. His guidelines for using humor in preaching are as follows:
 - Humor should always be appropriate to the occasion.
 - Humor should contribute to the point being made in a clarifying and vivid way.
 - Humor should be spontaneous as much as possible. Since humor is subjective, humorous references should fall into place naturally and easily.
 - Humor should spring from our perception of the incongruous, even in oneself.
 - Humor should enable our hearers to take us seriously. If we use humor sparingly, its effect will be all the more powerful. Humor is always a means to an end.²⁹

If the preacher is going to use humor as part of his or her presentation it should not be a side joke. George Sweazy says,

Humor in sermons has to stay within the main channel of the thought. If it makes no real contribution to clarifying or applying what the sermon is trying to convey, it has to be left out.”³⁰ “Getting the joke is not the goal, neither is laughter. Critical for

28 Ibid. 6.

29 Ibid.

30 George E. Sweazy, Preaching the Good News. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hill, 1976) 210.

the listeners is a sense of coherence between the preacher's humorous story and the overall message they are hearing. Relevant humor increases understanding; irrelevant humor does not. The key is that the humor be relevant to the point the speaker is making. Preachers must resist using humor for its own sake. A preacher can be funny, but he cannot be preoccupied with being funny. To fall into this temptation is to undermine the credibility of the preacher and – much worse – of the Gospel that God has called him to proclaim.”³¹

The most popular use of the imagination in preaching is in the use of sermon illustrations. What does it mean to illustrate? “To illustrate” is a transitive verb, meaning it demands an object. By definition an illustration is a story, statistic, question, or statement that is attached to an object. It is not an illustration without a connection to its object. “The root meaning of “to illustrate” is “to shed light upon” or “to illumine.” Thus, until our story, statistic, sample, or data shed light on something, it fails to illustrate because there's no clear connection between it and the intended object.”³²

According to Keith Willhete, an illustration is sometimes designed to accomplish more than one purpose, but the essential purpose of an illustration falls into one of three categories: explanation, validation or application.

When you use an illustration to explain, you may want to expand, clarify, elucidate, simplify, specify, make something concrete, or contrast things, but your overall objective is to stimulate understanding. When you use an illustration to validate, you may be trying to gain agreement, prove something, show it as realistic, make it believable, convince people, relate truth to tangible experiences, or weaken resistance. As you validate you may

31 James R. Barnette. A Time to Laugh: Principles of Good Pulpit Humor. Preaching. Vol.11 No.5 March – April 1996. 5-7.

32 Keith Willhete. Preaching with Relevance (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications.2001) 104.

weaken resistance or lessen the argument of your listeners. Illustrations that apply usually have the most value in terms of impact or feeling. Granted, you need to choose illustrations according to purpose. What makes an illustration applicational is that it relates truth to concrete experience. It visualizes for people what the application looks like in their lives or the lives of others.³³

We live and preach in a visual culture and the Word of God has to be expounded in such a way that people see in pictures. The use of illustration is a tricky business. An illustration can be the difference of someone remembering the point of a sermon or an illustration can be the means of destroying the point of the sermon. The purpose of illustrations is strictly utilitarian: They are to make clear that which is being said – to make it concrete; to bring it down to cases, so that our people may identify with it and say, “Yes, that is my life and story.”³⁴

This begs the question, What is a good illustration?

“A good illustration may grab a congregation at the beginning of a sermon by showing them that the text is about their lives, and then more illustrations may sustain that interest throughout the entire length of the delivery by making every point crystal clear and by forming pictures for its concrete meaning in the people’s mind. Good illustrations personalize the biblical message, and may drive it home to some reluctant heart. Good illustrations catch the mood of the congregational response to the Word, give voice to the faith the sermon has aroused and verbalize the people’s “Yes, yes. Oh yes!”³⁵

Good illustrations will help the text to be understood: they also serve a function in the development and structure of the sermon. Illustrations help with the variety and pacing of the sermons. A couple of cautions are to be

33 Ibid. 105-111.

34 Achtemier. 105.

35 Ibid. 106.

understood. “One, do not let the listeners get bogged down in the illustration. This means illustrations should be short and to the point. Second, the preacher should not be using illustrations back to back. D. M. Lloyd - Jones refers to some sermons as “skyscraper sermons” – one story on top of another. In a sermon the preacher should not use two illustrations back to back for that will stop the forward movement of the sermon. Also an illustration should never have to be explained, if the preacher has to explain the illustration to explain the text they should leave out the illustration. “³⁶

“No illustration should need to be explained, says Achtemeier. Either it should illumine immediately, or it should not be used.” So too, no incident or scene from a movie or book or similar source should be employed if it is necessary to go to great lengths to explain its context. We can never assume that all our listeners have read a particular book or seen a particular movie or TV program, no matter how popular such may be. If such an illustration interrupts the forward flow of a sermon for more than a moment or two, then it probably is an illustration that should not be used.³⁷

James Berkley relate the six things to remember in answering the question: “What do I want to do with an illustration? Consider some legitimate purposes and some scriptural examples.

1. To clarify a point – Jesus’ parables of the lost coin and sheep.
2. To show a real-life application – much of the Sermon on the Mount.
3. To convict of sin – Nathan’s parable to David related to his taking of the poor man’s sheep.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Achtemerer. 108.

4. To inspire and move to action – the parables of the Prodigal son and the Good Samaritan.
5. To convince someone of truth – Paul reminding the Athenians of “the unknown god.”
6. To make truth memorable – Jesus’ unique sayings, such as the camel passing through the eye of the needle.³⁸

Berkley quoting Robinsion says, “Simply placing the right illustration with the right point is not enough. Good preparation includes good declaration.” The he gives some suggestions for serving illustrations hot.

1. Don’t waste time getting into the story. Get in and get out. Don’t over explain, apologize, or make other unnecessary comments such as “I found this perfect illustration the other day...” Such comments challenge the listener to prove us wrong rather than to wait eagerly for the story.
2. Make sure the people know what you’re illustrating. Too often they remember the illustration and forget the point. Why? We don’t rivet the point to the illustration by repeating it before and after.
3. Make sure your illustrations don’t overshadow your point. Many ripping good stories rip up the house and the sermon. All the people get is a good laugh.
4. Be excited about the illustration. If I’m not convinced it’s interesting and worthwhile, the audience won’t be. The point of the illustration is to make the truth clear.
5. Make sure it’s believable and true. Some speakers say that putting yourself into a story, whether you really were there or not, is legitimate. But it can also create distrust.
6. Make sure people will identify with the illustration. If the listener can see themselves in the illustration then it is successful.
7. Be sure of your facts. If you are going to quote someone make sure it is a correct quote. If you’re going to use facts and figures make sure they are up to date and accurate.
8. Be visual. Visual speaking creates pictures in the listener’s minds. Use an illustration with sharp verbs, and nouns, few adjectives and lots of color.³⁹

38 James D. Berkley. Preaching to Convince (Waco: Work Books, 1986) 96.

39 Ibid. 98

Stephen Brown says

There are a number of ways for the preacher to find good illustrations. Most illustrations come from life and from being sensitive to it. Every encounter with real people – every hurt heard, every occupation observed, every life lived – provides illustrative material for sermons. “Someone has said that the art of writing is observation.” One of the greatest sources of illustrations is personal and what is going on in the preacher’s life.⁴⁰

Another place to get illustrations is, of course, by reading. One of the reasons many preachers miss the mark is because most of their reading has to do with theology and the people in the pew don’t read theology. Some preacher will read books and journals that have illustrations. One must be careful in the use of these illustrations. Upon hearing a convention preacher preach someone commented, “He used his last issue of Leadership magazine well. He used eight out of the ten illustrations that were published in the last issue.” There are a number of books of illustrations on the market, usually with a very limited number of usable illustrations. Most of the illustrations are out of date, not easily understood and you shouldn’t have to explain the illustration.

Illustrations can be found on any number of sites found on the internet. Many of the illustrations are good and effective. However, if they are to be used make sure that your honest and tell the congregation where the illustration originated. If an illustration seems out of character or beyond the experience of the preacher the listener will have trouble trusting the preacher.

⁴⁰ Stephen Brown. Handbook of Contemporary Preaching: Illustrating the Sermon (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992) 2000.

Jay Adams says that preachers should not use biblical illustrations. He writes:

Many preachers use Scripture, especially the Old Testament, illustratively. Don't do it. Always use the Bible authoritatively; never illustratively. Scripture was not given merely to illustrate points; it was written to make points. If you don't pay attention to this warning, the first thing you know, you will find yourself making points you want to make and using (misusing) the Bible to illustrate and back up your ideas. Psychologizers do that all the time.⁴¹

On the other hand you can use an Old Testament story in a very powerful way to back up or illustrate a point in a sermon. Drawing the Old Testament and the New Testament together in making a point in a sermon is very powerful. Jesus used the story of Adam and the sojourning of Abraham and the Exodus as He preached the Good News to the people in His time. Why shouldn't the modern preacher, especially in a culture where story is very important to preaching the Word of God, use the Old Testament illustratively?

Illustrations should never be used without some guidelines. Willhite gives fourteen guidelines that are most helpful in the use of illustrations.⁴²

1. Be sure that the illustration illustrates.
2. Illustrations must be easily understood.
3. Illustrations need to be credible. Credibility requires giving proper credit for the illustration. The basic rule of thumb is that if another speaker or writer used a story to illustrate a point, don't assume credit for its illustrative power. It's easy to give credit quickly where credit is due.
4. Personal illustrations help your audience identify, but the illustration should be modest, true, and discreet.

⁴¹ Jay E. Adams. Preaching with Purpose (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1981) 103.

⁴² Willhite 14-18.

5. Illustrations should not only be accurate but appropriate.
In his preaching primer *Biblical Preaching*, Haddon Robinson gives an example of an illustration that may be accurate but certainly is not appropriate. Dr. Robinson writes, “One preacher trying to stress the omnipresence of God declared, ‘God is even in the trash can.’⁴³
6. Tell an illustration instead of reading it.
7. Do not use an illustration that has more impact than the big idea of the sermon.
8. Never twist the text to use an illustration. This guideline is perhaps the most important of all. As preachers, we need to develop an ear for the illustrative story, a good example, a powerful tale, and sometimes we hear something that is so good we think to ourselves. “That’ll preach!” or “Where can I find a text to use that illustration?” Such thoughts may lead us to dangerously compromise biblical authority. The power of the sermon is never in the illustration. The power of the sermon is in the Word of God.
9. Illustrations in sermon introductions should introduce the subject, raise a question that the sermon will answer, touch a need, or accomplish other goals of an introduction.
10. Illustrations in sermon conclusions should drive home the sermon’s big idea, synthesizing the whole sermon.
11. Don’t illustrate the unknown with the unknown. If you’re using a biblical story don’t assume that the listeners know the story.
12. Listeners usually perceive contemporary illustrations as more relevant than historical illustrations. This is especially true when using quotes. No longer do listeners recognize the names of great preachers but they do know the lines from modern movies and music.
13. Personal illustrations have much greater potential to apply and convince than “a story I heard.” About personal stories Robinson says, “Personal illustrations must be true, this is a credibility matter. Personal illustrations must be modest. Personal stories should be

⁴³ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 152.

told without apology. If we apologize, we draw attention to something other than the illustration.⁴⁴

14. Almost any illustration is better than an illustration that comes from an illustration book.

The creative imagination of the preacher helps the sermon come alive when the use of humor and good illustrations are applied skillfully.

Humor and illustrations are not enough to bring the sermon alive before a listening and watching congregation. Much is communicated with the use of the body, and soul of the preacher. In the next chapter we will look at the importance of preaching with the whole body. Preparing the preacher to preach must not be overlooked because the postmodern listener visualizes the sermon through voice, gesture, posture, and passion.

⁴⁴ Robinson. 153-54.

Chapter Four

Preaching and the Whole Body

“The Word became flesh.” John 1:14

Joey Johnson was Moody Bible Institute “Preacher of the Year.” I watched intently as he began his sermon at a pastors’ conference. He started very slowly in a conversational style. His opening words were soothing and you could feel yourself slip back into your seat. Yet, the sermon progressed I found myself sitting on the edge of my seat as I watched what seemed to be a mild mannered young preacher grow into a spiritually mature preacher right before my eyes. With every word and phrase power came from his words and his body moved with grace and force. One phrase in the middle of his sermon described for me what happens in the preaching of the sermon. Joey shouted the words, “Stand up in him, Jesus,” a phrase often used in his church and other black congregations, describing what is happening to the preacher anointed by the Holy Spirit during the preaching moment. Joey Johnson was describing what happens when the true preacher is preaching the true word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. As I watched and listened to him preach I began to understand “the word becoming flesh” in the preaching moment, Jesus and the Word working in the preacher spiritually and physically as the sermon is being preached. He was describing what I have tried to do over the years and what preaching scholars have called “incarnational preaching.”

Incarnational preaching has theological roots. It is preaching that involves the Trinity. Michael Quicke says, “Preaching is a Father event, a Christ event, a Spirit event or it is merely resounding gongs or clanging cymbals. Preaching occurs within a 360-degree dynamic as the Lord gives a word and it returns to Him. Preaching flows from God the Father, who addresses us in Scripture and in Christ, through the responses of the preacher and the people, and then back to God in the form of worship, witness, and service. It involves movement through 360 degrees of eventfulness as God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – speaks through his Word and empowers the preacher and convicts the listener and transforms the lives of the preacher and listener.”¹

Quicke calls his model the “preaching swim.” Like a river gathering strength as it widens and deepens, the preacher lives in the flow of God’s Word which flows out creating new channels, deepening and impacting the lives of the listeners. The swim is compared to the cycle of rain falling from heaven and not returning until it has watered the earth causing seed to grow, “so shall my word be that goes from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isa. 55:11).

This model of preaching is summarized by the following: “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with

¹ Michael Quick. Preaching (Sept-Oct 2003) 39

us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3) 2

Johnson reminds us that, “For many postmodern listeners the message of the Bible has no meaning, and they don’t understand it. For others the message of the Bible has nothing substantial to say to people living in our time; for some the message of the Bible has neither meaning nor relevance. The role of the preacher is to supply both meaning and relevance to people who initially do not understand the message nor perceive its need. Preaching must consist of aspects, meaning and relevance.”³ “We must remember that postmodern people view their time as a commodity, and a precious one, so the very thought of “wasting” a Sunday morning with little or no take-home value is repugnant.”⁴

The preacher achieves the ability to speak incarnationally to a postmodern audience by understanding the audience, who they are, how they think and feel, what their perceived and unperceived needs are; and then relating Biblical principles and ideas to them in such a way that they can see meaning and relevance to them.⁵

“Any hope for involvement to engage the listener must start with the attitude of the preacher. He or she has to want involvement. But that desire must grow directly out of the care felt for the people. No one cares how much we know until he knows how much we care.”⁶ If you desire to be an

2 Ibid. 51.

3 Johnson. 64.

4 Johnson. 59.

5 Johnson. 65.

6 Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis. Inductive Preaching. (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1983) 22.

incarnational preacher you must know the One from whom the message comes, you must know the message, and you must know the one to whom the message will go.⁷

I believe that incarnational preaching, “Jesus standing up in the preacher,” has both physical and spiritual implications as preaching is done with the whole body. Postmoderns desire to experience the sermon. Therefore, it is important how the preacher appears before the audience. From the first moment body language and voice inflection will determine for the audience if the preacher has something to say that is worth hearing.

Preaching takes place within the context of the worship of God. In my first year of Bible College I took my first course in preaching. In the opening lecture the professor took out the church bulletin and described the worship service of the previous Sunday. As he talked about the order of the service he described everything up to the sermon as “the preliminaries.” He was telling us that the most important event or the only event in the worship service was the sermon. The sermon being the center of the service was reinforced throughout my theological education.

In recent years I have come to believe that whether you use a liturgical, traditional, or contemporary style of worship preaching is still central but one of a number of ways to worship God within the context of a worship service. Even the semantics of worship has changed. We use to talk about the “order of the service” now we talk about “the service of worship.” I have seen orders of

⁷ Johnson. 65.

service that have no theme or sense of giving worshippers direction towards God. Today there is a trend to create a worship experience that from beginning to end is “all about God,” helping the person in the pew to focus on God within the experience we call worship.

The worship style we are using at Aenon comprises praise, using songs, hymns, and spiritual songs; promotion, which is commonly called the announcements or the church at work internally and externally; provision the giving of His tithes and our offerings; prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and service; and proclamation the reading and preaching of the Word of God. Preaching has become part of the overall worship of God, not standing alone without any real relevance to the worship of God. The preaching of the word is not an isolated event but an integrated event in the worship of God. All aspects of the worship service are directed to the preaching moment.

I agree with Stephen A. Macchia that if a church is going to grow in our postmodern times there will be a shift from traditional to contemporary worship experience. He describes this shift as “Worship teams and bands are being utilized more and more all the time. Church organs and large choirs are being replaced by a wide variety of instruments and up-front soloists and worship leaders. Large congregations often offer both the traditional and the contemporary expressions of worship to suit the multigenerational style preferences represented in our churches today.”⁸

⁸ Stephen A. Macchia. Becoming a Healthy Church. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 1999) 20.

In our smaller churches traditional and contemporary style can come together in a “blended style.” I know this works, for we have developed this style very successfully over the past number of years at Aeon Baptist Church. Whatever method a church develops, God-Exalting Worship is when the healthy church gathers regularly as the local expression of the body of Christ to worship God in ways that engage the heart, mind, soul, and strength of the people.

Because we preach with the whole body, the physical body and how it is clothed becomes important. In the postmodern culture church services are planned to be “seeker sensitive” and this has led to a more “casual style” in the physical dress of the preacher. In a desire to be relevant and seeker sensitive many preachers come to the front of their congregations dressed in casual attire, trading academic robes and three piece suits for dockers slacks and golf shirts. The logic is to make everyone who is listening comfortable and not feel out of place in the worship service. This casual look is promoted by the seeker sensitive church model and has been picked up in many churches by pastors in a trendy sort of way. Though I may be uncomfortable myself I have discovered that my own congregation is not uncomfortable with the casual uniform. My struggle with the casual style of dress has to do with pastoral or pulpit authority that more formal dress gives to the presentation of the word of God. I have grown up believing that a shirt and tie, wearing a suit is the only acceptable way of presenting oneself in the pulpit. I am experimenting with the casual style of dress in the summer months because of the hot weather and have experienced

a spirit of acceptance in my congregations. Dressing down may have very little to do with the listening of the sermon. The preacher must however be sensitive to the preaching context and dress appropriately. Casual dress functions well at a youth event or an evening service. More traditional dress such as a suit or vestments will be appropriate in a more formal or liturgical worship setting.

Keaton Anderson writes, "Dress is very important. The preacher needs to take it seriously. The problem is that to be overdressed can be just as big a problem as to be underdressed. Use your manner of dress to create connection with your listeners as opposed to creating distance." ⁹ This works if the worship experience is in an evangelical church. Casual dress probably will not in a liturgical church where the preacher performs the role of priest as the leader of the worship experience.

I have been convinced over the years that if we are to preach with our whole body then some care needs to be taken of our physical appearance and this includes our weight. I remember being in an evening service when a visiting preacher came to the pulpit. He announced his sermon topic as being "How to Live a Disciplined Life." I had a lot of trouble listening to his sermon because the preacher was extremely overweight.

⁹ Keaton Anderson. Physical Presentation for Preaching. www.preaching.org Oct.31, 2003.

Several months ago I visited my doctor. After an examination he said to me, “The only thing you have got going for you is that you don’t smoke.” He then encouraged me to get my physical health on track. I have taken his advice and have noticed that a healthy diet, a proper amount of sleep, and scheduled exercise have helped physically delivering of the Word of God to my flock.

It might be said that the physical appearance of the preacher is not relevant to the message that is being preached. In “incarnational preaching” passion comes through the preacher’s character. But for many the “medium is the message” in our postmodern age. How the message comes across through the physical appearance of the preacher is important. Sometimes how the preacher is dressed speaks of his or her desire to be heard.

In the physical aspects there are other obstacles in preaching to be considered. I have grown up to believe that the pulpit is “the sacred desk.” By standing behind the pulpit there is an inherent authority given to the preacher. However, in our postmodern contemporary churches the place of the pulpit has been questioned. Anderson advocates that “if you need the pulpit as a place to put your notes, which is fine, but there is nothing quite as powerful as stepping around in front in order to communicate directly with the people. Sometimes it feels like the furniture is getting in the way.”¹⁰

Wayne McDill, Professor of Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Seminary, gives a number of good guidelines for preachers who continue to use the platform and the pulpit in preaching.

¹⁰ Ibid.

First, he suggests the need to be aware of what your posture communicates. Poor posture, slumped shoulders, and a general slouching look suggests that you are lazy, lacking in confidence, maybe even undisciplined. Posture is also important to your breathing and the effect that has on your speaking voice. The preacher should stand upright but not rigid. If this is a problem then the preacher must consider whether posture reflects the need for physical exercise and conditioning. Second, establish “home base” at the pulpit or at the center of the platform.” This is “center stage” in drama terms and is the strongest position on the platform. Once you have established this base at the pulpit, all platform movement will have the pulpit as its reference. Beginning at the pulpit says that the sermon has begun and that the Word of God is being honored.

The long tradition behind the pulpit gives it a special place in the minds of believers. For those from traditional church backgrounds, the pulpit represents the authority of God and His word. It is the official position for the Word of God to be declared. It is the “sacred desk” for such proclamation, and any other location is not as official or authoritative.

Third, once “home base” is established at the pulpit or platform center, any movement away from that position should be connected with a change in sermon material. Moving to the side of the pulpit suggests a more personal and intimate word to be shared. You may want to move when you begin an illustration. You may also move to the side when you want to step closer to the audience and bring the biblical truth home with specific applications. Restrain yourself from restless wandering which can be a serious distraction that keeps your audience from concentrating on the message.¹¹

Depending on the audience, there may be significant differences of opinion about the preacher’s movement on the platform as he preaches. In some churches the tradition is for the preacher to stay behind the pulpit and avoid unnecessary movement. In other churches there is no pulpit to use, and the preacher moves about freely, as illustrated in the preaching services that are on the television on Sunday afternoons or evening. Church services from The People’s Church show their preacher using the pulpit and center stage of the platform. Dr. David Jeremiah, a wonderful Bible teacher, also uses the pulpit as home base. The black preacher Dr. T.J. Jakes, pastor of The Potter’s

¹¹ Wayne McDill. Preaching is more than Words. Preaching November/December 1999. 46.

House Church does not use a pulpit but paces back and forth across the platform and sometimes down front as he preaches or exhorts his people.

Charles Stanley seldom uses a pulpit but holds his Bible throughout the sermon delivery.

For some preachers body language is so important that the best situation for communication would be to do without a pulpit altogether. The problem with pulpits is not a new one. Henry Ward Beecher offered this rather vivid assessment more than a hundred years ago.

You put a man in one of those barreled pulpits, where there is not responsibility laid upon him as to his body, and he falls into all manner of gawky attitudes, and rests himself like a country horse at a hitching post. He sags down, and has no consciousness of his awkwardness. But bring him out on a platform, and see how much more manly he becomes, how much more force comes out. The moment a man is brought face to face with other men, then does the influence of each act and react upon the other.¹²

Tom Long says,

Occasionally in my teaching I find students who do not want to preach from the pulpit. They view the pulpit as elevating the clergy in an oppressive fashion, and they prefer to preach down on the level with the congregation. Much can be said for that style, of course, especially on certain occasions, but it always makes me wonder whether the student is really responding to democracy or whether the student has suddenly felt the demands of the authority and responsibility genuinely present in the preaching moment itself and is searching for some relief.”¹³ The preacher must always remember that authority in preaching resides essentially in the

¹² Ibid. 45.

¹³ Thomas Long. The Senses of Preaching. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) 62.

event, not in the person or the office of the preacher. We may speak meaningfully of the authority of the preacher, of course, but only if we remember that such authority is always derived from the dynamic relationship between the preacher and the eventfulness of the preaching act.¹⁴

Along with platform and pulpit as obstacles, so also is sound and lighting. I can still hear my first homiletics professor tell the class that the preacher is to project his/her voice so that it bounces off the back wall of the sanctuary. In most churches today the sound system is used because our postmodern culture is wired to listen to audio speakers. The sound system can be an obstacle when it is not adequate for its purpose. When the sound system is not working properly or the person running the system is not proficient it can be a great obstacle in the presentation of the message. Today's technology has come a long way in sound systems. Microphones with cords can be replaced with cordless systems allowing for more freedom of movement. The lapel microphone can be replaced with one that attaches to the ear and comes to the side of the face to allow for head movement without creating a dead zone.

Lighting is another factor. In some churches pulpit lights are used to illuminate the notes of the preacher. However, the congregation is unable to see the facial expressions, and eye contact is nothing but a glare from the pulpit. If the pulpit is the "home base" for preaching, then lighting the platform is important for non-verbal communications. When I came to Aenon one of the first upgrades we did was to put in track lighting to illuminate the platform for the benefit of the preacher and the listener.

¹⁴ Ibid. 63.

The main reason that lighting is important is because only 35 percent of preaching is verbal; the rest is nonverbal. Other channels for communication are the tone of voice, facial expressions, hand gestures, and, as already mentioned, even the way the preacher is dressed. The nonverbal elements are constantly sending out signals about who we are, our attitudes, our intentions, our sincerity. And these signals are believed. They affect our relationship with our audience before we even begin to speak. 15

Many conclusions come from the audience through nonverbal and verbal communications. “A person who doesn’t maintain direct eye contact isn’t being sincere. If you’re not looking at me, you are not interested in what I am saying. A person who dresses poorly cannot be trusted. Men with low-pitched voices are more credible than those with high-pitched voices. A person sitting with arms folded across the chest is being closed or defensive. Crying is a sign of weakness. The list can go on but suffice it to say that most misunderstandings in oral communications can be traced to the nonverbal signals.”¹⁶

There is not much material on the nonverbal communication of gesturing. In the book, Lectures to My Students, C.H. Spurgeon attempts to give thirty hand gestures in the communication process. Gesturing is very natural for some preachers while other preachers plan gestures into their messages. What is a gesture? “A gesture is any movement of the head, body, or limbs to emphasize something we are saying. Even planned gestures should be so

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 44.

natural and fitting to what we are saying, that they appear to be unplanned. When we gesture effectively, communication is greatly benefited.”¹⁷

Gesturing means using our hands effectively. There are two extremes in gesturing. Some preachers use their hands so often that it is distracting. Sometimes this can be attributed to culture or is just “restless gesturing” not knowing what to do with one’s hands. On the other hand, some preachers hang on to their pulpit until their knuckles turn white, or hold on to their Bible while preaching, or put their hands in their pockets. This effectively robs the hands from creative gesturing.

Roy DeBrand, Professor of Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that there are two horizontal planes for gesturing and three vertical planes we might use.

If we are making appeals, emphasizing or applying some truth directly to our congregation, or challenging people directly, then we will want to gesture in the area immediately in front of us, the center horizontal area. When we use our hands right out in front of us, then we are indicating people and ideas directly.

If we want to indicate people and ideas indirectly, then we will want to make our gestures off to the left or right side on a horizontal plane, rather than right in front of us. If we are preaching about dividing sheep from goats then we probably do not want to move our hands toward the congregation, but off to one side or another. The same would be true about gesturing anything negative or condemnatory, or even things off at a distance like scenery. Anytime we want to indicate indirectness, it is best to use the side horizontal planes.

When considering the three vertical planes for gesturing. The shoulders upward, the upper vertical

¹⁷ Michael Duduit. Handbook of Contemporary Preaching (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992) 401.

area might denote lofty ideas, people, places, and things. Use this upper area to communicate about God, heaven, prayer, goodness, the Christian life, and high ideas and morality. The middle areas, from the shoulders to the hips, could be used to indicate people, especially children. We could also think of this space as the plane in which to make direct appeals and applications to the congregation. Finally, we must use the lower vertical region, from the hips down, to gesture about baser ideas – sin, Satan, evil, lower standards of living, and low morality. 18

When we are preparing our sermons for delivery we need to bear in mind not only areas for gesturing but three general types of gestures we might employ to help people picture what we are saying.

First, there is the partial gesture, which gives a hint of the idea with which we are dealing. Partial gestures effectively describe falling, rising, speed, and a multitude of ideas with the flick of a hand or a nod of the head. Second, the descriptive gestures show shape or size. Billy Graham uses this one when speaking of the cross of Christ while stretching out his arms as if on a cross. The third type of gesture is the emphatic. Pointing with the index finger will show power, or strength. When we gesture with our palms down we indicate rejection or negativity. Palm up accentuates the positive – acceptance, appeal, invitation, affirmation, and similar qualities. A parallel palm with either one or both hands demonstrates cutting something off, the end; it is called “wood-chopping” gesture. Putting our hands flat toward the audience symbolizes holding them off at a distance, rejection, while open arms indicates the exact opposite. There are many varied and creative ways to use emphatic gestures, as well as partial and descriptive ones. 19

18 Dudit. 402.

19 Ibid., 403.

DeBrand, says,

Ideally, the way we move and use our hands while preaching should be both planned and spontaneous. We need to visualize our sermon contents in terms of gestures, both in areas and types. Avoid being mechanical when gesturing. Mental planning is the key to effectiveness. Practice gestures as the sermon is rehearsed orally. Decide the best place in the sermon for certain gestures, the best way to do them, and the best time for them. Keep restless movement to a minimum. Communication can be greatly affected by the way we use our hands, head, and body while preaching. Make meaningful, creative, communication-enhancing movement in the pulpit.²⁰ Preachers are to be encouraged to be themselves by using hand gestures in a natural fashion.

Equally important to hand gestures are the communication that comes from the facial expressions of the preacher. As preachers we must learn to let our facial expressions mirror our words. We generally want to have a pleasant expression on our face when we are in front of people; not silly or inane, just pleasant. Then, as we speak, we need to reflect what we are saying by our facial expressions. We will avoid looking stern and angry unless we are. When addressing happy subjects we should inform our face about it and look happy. On the other hand, we do not want to be smiling when addressing sad or serious subjects. Avoid at all cost the “frozen face”, or wooden expressions. Our faces are great tools for communicating. We should think about how our faces look as we prepare and deliver our sermons. The keys to effective facial expressions are naturalness and variety. Another key to effective facial expressions is found in the preacher’s spiritual life. As the Word of God becomes incarnate in the heart and life of the preacher it will be communicated through face, particularly the eyes.²¹

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Someone has said, “The eyes are the gateway to the soul.” This is true when it comes to effective preaching. While on vacation I was able to listen and observe a fellow pastor as he preached to his congregation. His content was wonderful, and his grasp of the text and theology could not be questioned. However, as he delivered his sermon he walked back and forth across the platform though he anchored himself at the pulpit. As he walked back and forth his eyes were not fixed on the congregation but on the ceiling and walls of the church building. It was his way of keeping contact with the material but there was little contact with the listener. I know he cares for his people and it would have communicated his love if he used appropriate eye contact. We must bear in mind that people do not want to be read a sermon; they want to be spoken to though a sermon.

Wayne McDill says, “The preacher’s eye contact with his audience serves several important functions.”²² It opens communication, establishes rapport, checks on audience reactions, makes you more believable, expresses emotion, and keeps our audiences interested. This is done six ways.

1. First, eye contact opens communication. When you establish eye contact with a person, it is the equivalent of ringing her up on the phone. Eye contact other than a passing glance tells another that you are interested in talking. When the preacher comes to the pulpit and looks at his or her congregation, he or she is opening that line of communication.
2. Eye contact in preaching, establishes rapport with the congregation, the compatibility and harmony that is necessary to persuasive speech. We trust people more when they look us in the eye. If there is a lack of eye contact, the audience feels they are not really in fellowship with the preacher. They tend to become restless and resistant to his or her message. Eye contact that reveals hostility is also quickly perceived by the audience and puts them in a defensive and resentful mode.

²² Ibid., 404

3. Eye contact allows the preacher to check the congregation's reactions to his or her sermon. The best method of gauging the attention and interest of the audience is by reading facial expression, particularly the eyes. If his hearers look at him/her intently, the preacher knows they are with him/her and following his/her thoughts with interest. If they begin to avert their eyes by looking down or to the side, he/she knows that the listeners are disengaging. They are disconnecting the communication link and moving away. These signals allow the preacher to adapt his sermon to congregational interest.
4. Eye contact with your congregation makes you believable. The credibility issue is very important to preachers. Studies have documented the connection between eye contact and increased credibility. Unless you maintain at least 50 percent eye contact with your audience, they will likely consider you unfriendly, uninformed, inexperienced, and even dishonest.
5. Eye contact also serves to display emotion. Some feel that the eyes alone reveal one's inner feelings. For the most part, however, the eyes can be the focus of attention for understanding the mood of another, with the face as the backdrop and reinforce for eye signals. Since the preacher's attitude toward his subject and his audience are critical for getting his message across, it is vital that preacher maintain eye contact with the congregation.
6. Eye contact helps to keep the congregation's interest. When a speaker fastens his eye on the manuscript or notes, that diversion immediately takes its toll on audience interest. When you are looking at your hearers, they are more likely to pay attention to you because that is the normal pattern in conversation. They give you their attention because your eye contact indicates your interest in them. As they read your passion for your subject in your eyes, they will be motivated to take it seriously. 23

To have good eye contact we need to be relatively free from our notes. Preaching with or without notes has caused some confusion and some misunderstanding in our present age. In March 1999 Leadership did a preaching survey called "Guilt-free Delivery."²⁴

23 Wayne McDill. Preaching Is More Than Words. Preaching: Nov.—Dec. 1999. 48.

24 Jerry Andrews. "The Great Delivery Debate." Leadership www.christianitytoday.com 4.

Guilt-free Delivery

Preaching without notes is still pretty rare.

Our survey shows 90% of preachers take their sermons to the pulpit in some written form:

Manuscript	26%
Detailed outline	36%
Skeleton outline	26%
No notes of any kind	5%
Other	4%

Leadership Survey, March 1999

Jerry Andrews pastor of First Presbyterian Church Glen Ellyn Illinois, gives a number of reasons for preaching without notes. He writes, “the pulpit is made for preaching, the lectern for reading. When I am in the pulpit, I need to preach, not read. Preaching is urgent. It is God’s Word spoken to my congregation. I want to look people in the eye and change their hearts by reforming their minds. That’s less likely to happen if I’m reading to them.”²⁵ According to Andrews preparing a manuscript eats up a lot of time that could be better spent prayerfully interacting with the subject. He uses a line that every seminarian has heard sometime in class:. The slogan is “One hour of preparation for every minute of preaching.” I remember hearing this line used a few years ago at the Simpson Lectures by a former professor. I challenged this statement because if it is a guideline then many preachers would have to spend between sixty and a hundred hours a week in the study preparing

²⁵Ibid., 5.

messages. Tom Long quotes Michael Quicke in reference to this slogan by saying, “The slogan an hour in the study for every minute in the pulpit is better than vice versa, I suppose, but it is finally an unrealistic legalism. What we need are ways of establishing a rhythm between the time spent in focused study and the time spent doing the rest of the tasks of ministry, so that each feeds and reinforces the other.”²⁶ It has been my experience that the sermon is never far from the thought process at the desk, driving the car, or doing pastoral care. Every pastoral experience lends itself to sermon preparation.

Andrews also makes the assumption that note taking is overrated. “If I can’t remember what I earlier thought I knew well enough to declare, then I am unprepared, period. No notes can save me from that. If I know what I am preaching, then I do not need notes.” I wondered if this is too simplistic and an excuse for not doing the necessary preparation of the sermon manuscript especially in this day of word processors. I would be concerned about rambling or going off into tangents without notes. Yet, Andrews says, “Rambling is a danger, but it’s manageable. An important safeguard is spiritual discipline – learning to keep my ego in check, so that I don’t feel obligated to regularly tell folks what I know so they can know that I know it. What I know is not the point of the sermon. The point of the sermon is to direct people to Christ. Staying focused on that is no more difficult while delivering a sermon extemporaneously

²⁶ Thomas Long The Senses of Preaching. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) 29.

than it is while preparing a manuscript. A manuscript is not a protection from tangents.”²⁷

Andrews is able to preach without notes because he is using a scriptural textual method. The text is the outline. As a preacher he retells the story, draws conclusions, sharing those that are most timely and significant for the congregation. He believes that the symbolism of the pastor holding the Bible while preaching is more meaningful than a preacher turning the pages of a manuscript.

He also believes that there is a spiritual benefit from preaching without notes. When you step into the pulpit without the aid of notes or manuscript, you immediately become more dependent on the Spirit of God. This is his assumption and I think it is extremely pompous! The Spirit of God is always needed in the preaching of the word regardless of the preparedness of the preacher or the sermon.

Andrews’ style could be called “extemporaneous preaching.” The preacher prepares ahead of time and develops an outline of major points. However when the sermon is delivered it seems to the congregation to be made up while the preacher is preaching. In extemporaneous preaching the message flows from the text.

Joseph M. Webb in his book Preaching Without Notes gives us probably the best reasons to preach without notes.

“The first reason for preaching without notes is because it makes possible the fullest and most intense bonding between the preacher and those

²⁷ Leadership. The Great Debate. 3.

who share in preaching. Within this bonding human passion is set free, and passion is as close to the cement of human bonding as we ever get. When a preacher preaches with passion he/she demonstrates deep feelings, even intensely, about the subject being talked about, and gives voice to those passionate ideas and feelings, then the words invariably will be the right words, whether they are poetic or not. They will be spoken not because they are the right words or because they are particularly vivid or poetic, but because they are the only words capable of expressing, at that moment, the deepest stirrings of the speaker.” 28

The preacher who writes a full manuscript and preaches from a full manuscript has the ability to think through and allow passion to be evident in the pages of the sermon. The flow of words from the brain to the page will help the preacher focus the passion coming from the heart.

We notice in the survey that the largest groups take a full manuscript or detailed manuscript to the pulpit. Preachers who preach from a manuscript prepare very thoroughly, spending healthy portions of time fashioning their sermons with the best language and formulation of thought of which they are capable. Preparing a manuscript forces the preacher to spend sufficient, intentional time in study, thinking about the message and meaning of a particular passage, analyzing the biblical material, formulating and preparing articulation of the major themes to be presented. What usually results is a more well-crafted and thoughtful presentation of God’s Word than might otherwise be offered.²⁹

28 Joseph M. Webb. Preaching Without Notes Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2001. 25-27.

29 Peter E. Roussakis. Why I Believe in Preaching with a Manuscript. Preaching Vol.16, No. 4 Jan-Feb. 2001. 34.

One reason to preach without notes is freedom. Preaching from notes enables the preacher to have a greater freedom of expression with the use of quotes and illustrations that are accurate. It also fosters a more organized sermon and can actually reduce the weekly research down a number of hours because of the expository research that keeps the preacher on track with the text. Preaching with notes allows the preacher to use conversational language making points without being repetitive, making transitional sentences leading to the next point.

Eye contact need not be sacrificed by the preacher using a manuscript. With practice the preacher can learn how to use the text of the manuscript without losing his/her place and at the same time provide a very pleasing delivery which keeps listeners attention. After all, if the sermon is interesting and well crafted, listeners will naturally maintain their focus.³⁰

A second reason for preaching without notes is because such a sermon, by its inductive, emergent nature, invites the participation of congregants more than any other kind of sermon delivery can. In the inductive form, one tries to create tension, even suspense, by not letting congregants know what is going to happen next as the sermon unfolds. A preacher can, of course, either write out and read an inductive sermon or prepare detailed inductive notes for use in the pulpit. But something else is very important here. Good speech communicators tell us that how one speaks can also be either deductive or inductive. What contributes the most effective public speaking is the inductively

³⁰ Ibid.

delivered sermon. Webb believes, “When an inductive delivery, such as preaching without notes, is wedded to the inductive form of sermon construction, one creates the most participatory sermon that is possible to create.”³¹

A third reason for preaching without notes according to Webb is that, in a world in which cynicism about what to believe or not believe is everywhere, the pulpit can become one of those rare places where lively witnessing and testifying take place. In order for one’s Christian witness to be as moving as it can possibly be, the witness must appear to come from the preacher’s heart and not from a page of the preacher’s sermon. One can move people by reading or speaking from notes, but one cannot move them very far. To give one’s most powerful witness, at least for the majority of people, it is necessary to stop reading, stop following one’s notes, set the paper aside, and just stand up and preach. He believes that those who listen to the sermon say to the preacher as they listen “Tell us what is going on with you, what you have learned, and what you now experience. Tell us from your heart, and we will know that what you say is true – if not true for all of us, at least true for you. And that, in itself, will mean a great deal.” ³² At this point Webb has hit a postmodern nerve. In a world that does not desire any absolutes the preacher has the wonderful task of preaching sermons that teach moral and biblical absolutes without apology.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Ibid., 30.

Language is always important in the presentation of the sermon. A well written manuscript keeps the preacher from using religious jargon, and the repetition of words. By using a manuscript the preacher will be conscious to use a variety of descriptive words for conceptual understanding of the sermon. When a manuscript is used communication will be more effective, the experience of listening to sermons will be more interesting, and therefore, the learning potential will be greater.

At Aenon the sermon is videotaped and made available to everyone. There are occasions when individuals ask for a written manuscript. An explanation must be given to remind the reader that the sermon preached is not necessarily word for word. There is always room for the leading of the Holy Spirit to change direction or enlarge a point when necessary in the preaching moment. Thus, the manuscript sermon is usually written in dialogue form, sentences are not as neat as a formal written sentence. The sermon is an oral communication which is less formal in its manuscript form. By writing a full manuscript the listener has an opportunity to read for greater understanding and knowledge of the preached word. Printed sermons may also be helpful for study groups who want to dig deeper into the text of the sermon.

Pastorally speaking, a sermon manuscript may be very helpful for the preacher to guard against saying things off-the-cuff or riding a favorite hobby horse. The manuscript helps to keep the preacher from putting his/her foot in his/her mouth. A manuscript gives the preacher time to think about the possible consequences or implications of his/her words.

I agree wholeheartedly with Rouskis when he reminds us that,

our appreciation for manuscript sermons should be heightened when we realize the great inspiration and instruction we receive by reading the preserved sermons of John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Wesley, George Whitefield, the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards and so many other of the past and present. When we realize the great influence these preachers had in people's lives in their own day and of the countless others through the years, we come to the conclusion that writing and preserving sermons has great value and ministry potential.³³

Someone once likened preaching a sermon to flying a plane. One of the reasons I come to the pulpit with a full manuscript is because I find it helpful to know how to take off, how long I have to fly, and make a committed landing.

Another reason I use a manuscript is because of the technology available through using a computer. By using a computer, writing a sermon does not have to start with the introduction, then the body, and finally the conclusion. You can start almost anywhere, use the computer's ability to rearrange and edit the desired outcome. The computer can track the number of words and allow the writer to judge the appropriate length of the sermon. Spell check and grammar check are a great help to the writer making sure that what is said is correct and well constructed.

Preaching from a manuscript forces the preacher to become familiar with the material to be preached. With each part of the sermon written out the preacher can become familiar with the points, illustrations, and stories. I have

³³ Ibid., 45.

discovered that if I practice preaching the sermon a couple of times on Saturday, and then read it over again a couple of hours before services I am able to remember most of the sermon without reading it from the pulpit. If I find myself reading the whole manuscript then I know that I do not know the material well enough. If I do not know the material then I cannot expect the congregation to remember.

Rick Knight, Senior Pastor of First Parish Congregational church in York Maine, gives some practical advice when producing a manuscript. He writes,

“Here are some techniques I use: Double space everything. Make type large enough to read easily, at least 12 points. Start every sentence at the left margin. You won’t have to search the middle of the paragraph to find the next sentence. Use bold print for key words and sentences. Use bold print and double underline for main points and illustrations. Place a hand-drawn star or asterisk in the left column of the page next to key sentences, main points, and the “punch-lines” to illustrations. Use bracket illustrations in the left column so you can find your place when you finish telling the story.³⁴

It is one thing for the preacher to preach with the whole body but we must remember that preaching is the art of communication and that it is a dialogue, not a monologue. Tom Long reminds us that “Augustine compared a sermon to a conversation in which preachers and hearers both take part.” Even though the hearer’s part is technically silent, it is still there, and even though the preacher exerts a high degree of control over the conversation, this control should not be coercive. Space should be made in the sermon for the hearer’s

³⁴ Leadership. The Great Debate. 9.

voice to find expression. 35 G.E. Sweazey makes a controversial claim by saying “The skills of the hearers are more important than the skills of the preacher”.36 He goes on to argue that hearers need their own instruction in homiletics...they need to know what the whole idea of preaching is. This overstates the case, for in preaching there is a principle of mutual responsibility with a complex balance of accountability between hearers and preacher.37 This accountability is biblical for the gospels testify that on several occasions we hear the words “Let anyone with ears to hear, listen.” (Mark 4:23; 7:16; Mat.11:15; 13:9,34; 35:29; Luke 8:8; 13:9; 21:4.)

It is interesting to look at Jesus’ parable in Mark 4:1-20 with its different soils and harshly realistic quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10. How significant is it that Jesus opens with the command: “Listen!” (vs.3) and concludes with the refrain: “Let anyone with ears, listen” (v.9)? It seems that hearers bear some responsibility for being seeded in ‘good soil’ accepting and bearing fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. It seems that “Let anyone with ears to hear listen” is not an empty ritual refrain but an urgent encouragement that listeners need to listen with more than their ears but also with spiritual apprehension. Michael Quicke calls this “holistic listening.” 38 Hearing words and not putting them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house upon sand. (Matt.7:26). Paul tells us that “faith comes from what is heard.” (Romans 10:17)

35 Thomas Long. *The Sense of Preaching*. 69.

36 George E. Sweazey. *Preaching The Good News* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976) 310.

37 Quicke. *Let Anyone Listen*. *Preaching*:(Sept-Oct 2003) 36.

38 Ibid.

How does the congregation listen? To answer this question Michael Quicke says that the congregation listens by “stereo”, listening both conceptually and symbolically. With the electronic revolution there are new possibilities for stereo listening, head and heart. There is an increasing awareness that conceptual language alone, characteristic of the print age, is not communicating as effectively in the electronic age. Contemporary congregations have people who hear, see and touch the preaching differently.³⁹

Quicke cites Murray Frick, Reach the Back Row

as Frick generalizes about three groups found in congregations: those who respond visually and often sit at the back of the congregation in order to see the big picture. Others respond audibly, sitting in the middle so as not to miss anything. Yet others respond kinesthetically preferring to be drawn into experience by participating physically. Sitting at the front, they engage with bodies as well as minds. Frick calls this a “total learning experience.”⁴⁰

Quicke also cites a study by Morreale and Bovee called “Excellence in Public Speaking” which stresses the importance of developing four kinds of listening skills which cover both kinds of language. They include: (a) Content or comprehensive listening to help the listener to understand a speaker’s message; (b) Critical listening which evaluates the message; (c) Empathetic listening which seeks to understand the speaker’s feelings and viewpoint and, appreciative listening which intentionally seeks to admire and enjoy.”⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴¹ Ibid.

When listening with the mind there are at least four ways people listen and learn. Bernice McCarthy identifies these four primary learning styles: Imaginative, Analytic, Common Sense, and Dynamic. Imaginative Learners are feeling people who get involved with others and learn best in settings that allow interpersonal relationships to develop. These curious, questioning learners learn by listening and sharing ideas. They see the broad overview or big picture much more easily than the small details. They learn by sensing, feeling watching. They can see all sides of the issues presented. Analytic Learners learn by watching and doing. They expect a preacher to be the primary information giver, while they sit and carefully assess the value of the information presented. These listeners want all the data before they make a decision. Common Sense Learners like to play with ideas to see if they are rational and workable. These listeners want to test theory in the real world, to apply what has been learned. The Dynamic Learner also enjoys action as part of the learning process, but rather than thinking projects through to their rational conclusion, Dynamic learners excel in following hunches and sensing new directions and possibilities. 42

In listening with their heads many older members of congregations have a strong preference for conceptual language in preaching which emphasizes precision, clarity, analysis, idea, explanation and linear sequence. They particularly focus on content listening and critical listening. These are the people who come to church with their Bibles and take notes.

The active listener is prepared to participate mentally with a speaker, to dialogue, question and engage with a developing linear thinking. The active listener is the postmodern listener, who wants to engage the preacher, to interact, to not only hear the sermon but feel and experience the preaching

42 Marlene D. LeFever. Learning Styles Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach. (Paris: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1995) 20-21.

moment. Postmodern listeners want to take something from the sermon and live it out in their daily lives. These are the people who listen not only with their mind but also with their heart.

The test of preaching is what happens in the behavior of the hearers. According to Paul in 1 Cor. 14:3 there are three outcomes of listening to the sermon. They are “building up” (oikodomeo), “encouragement” (paraclesis) and “consolation” (paramythia). In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul adds “convince” (elegoon) and “rebuke” (epitemeson). Every sermon must have a controlling idea and require some intellectual growth or increased understanding, but maturity of attitude and behavior – deep trust with willing obedience is the central objective.

If effective preaching is done with the whole body and preaching is done by speaking then some care is to be taken with the use of the voice. The way we use the voice in speech is directly tied to the whole personality.

I came to understand the power of the voice over twelve years ago. Two weeks before Christmas a car filled with teens left an icy road. Three of the four were killed, including a sixteen year old young man from my own congregation. I was asked by the police to go to the home and tell the parents the tragic news. I did so as their pastor but I learned through this experience that the voice can resonate profound joy and sorrow. The father stopped attending church. As pastor I had performed the funeral, followed up with a number of follow up visits to the grieving family. One evening I asked the father why he had not been attending church. His reply taught me a valuable lesson: let not the pastor be the teller of bad news. He did not come to church because he could not bear to

listen to the sound of my voice, the voice that gave him the worst news any loving father could ever hear.

The voice is not to be used out of character with the preacher. Often we hear someone preach and do not recognize the voice. They are using what used to be called “ministerial tone.” “Preachers often change their voices when they enter the pulpit, adopting a speech pattern that is louder, higher in pitch, tending toward a monotone, and generally sounding like a stereotypical preacher.”⁴³

The voice of the preacher should be natural. Some believe that the most effective delivery style for this generation can be called conversational. Conversational style is dialogical. It is a two-way flow of communication as the preacher pays as close attention to his or her audience as he or she hopes they will to him.

McDill advocates the use of the conversational style which employs the melody of normal speech. “It allows a variety of rate, pitch, volume, mood and language. There is room for drama and description, pathos and persuasion, argument and anguish.”⁴⁴

If the preacher preaches with his or her whole body then the life experiences of the preacher are important. There are several implications where life experiences and personality become important to the preaching of the Word. First, no part of genuine preaching is passive. We must resist the idea that preachers can stand in front of their congregations week after week

43 Wayne McDill, Low-Tech Preaching in a High-Tech Age. Preaching. Vo.17 No. 6. May/June 2002. 2.

44 Ibid.

and preach without preparation or without thinking. There are some preachers who speak without thinking and they are dense, lazy, incompetent, or preoccupied. The preacher is involved in every aspect of the preaching process. It is in the preacher's conscience that the sermon is born, and the mind is not a vacuum.

David Farmer writes, "The holy word of God takes shape in a mind bursting with its own God-given creativity and potential for limitless happiness and joy. All of you – traits of which you're proud and traits you'd like to put away, achievements with failures – becomes a part of your preaching because God intends to use you, and that means all of you."⁴⁵ "God uses our victories and our failures in the preaching process. The most important part of the preparation and delivery of the sermon is what goes on in you during each phase of preparation and during every minute of delivery. God has chosen you for his task, and God intends to use you. Never forget that."⁴⁶

Secondly, what you think is important. Preaching is not a matter of reporting what the finest or the poorest commentaries say about the passage. Preaching, at its best, is the preacher sharing the message of the text with divinely inspired thought as a result of the text becoming part of the preacher. This is called "Incarnational Preaching." In the words of Clyde Fant,

Preaching continues to have an irreplaceable position in Christian theology and Christian worship because it does what God did in his self-disclosure to Israel, in his revelation to prophets and apostles,

⁴⁵ David Albert Farmer. "Truth Through Personality" The Clergy Journal. Vol LXX No.10 Sept 1994. 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 3.

in the fullness of his revelation in Jesus. It provides a medium for revelation which enables the eternal Word to maintain its living, dynamic character and encounter our concrete situation. When the Word would make its fullness known, it took on flesh and dwelt among us, and in order to make itself known now, the word must keep on becoming flesh among us...Only when preaching is incarnational is it truly preaching.⁴⁷

Third, preaching is a highly individualized art. Remember the words of Phillips Brooks, "Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth."⁴⁸

Preaching is a highly individualized art and an individual calling. I agree with Farmer when he says,

When God called you to preach – in whatever way you heard and hear God's voice – God was calling all of you to proclaim the divine message in ways and places which no one else can do in just the way you can. This is to say that your calling to preach is a birth in which you are not fully developed. The final product of who you are as a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ rests on your ability to become fully the preacher God is calling you to be.⁴⁹

We have this message in earthen vessels. Paul in 1 Cor. 9:15 writes, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." God truly wraps himself up in the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 4.

whole life of the preacher so that the preacher's life and message is a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God and as an act of worship.

Chapter Five

Preaching the Old Message with a New Method

“The postmodern person desires the preacher to engage in the preaching moment, not speak at them from the Word of God, concerning the things of God.”¹ There are several methods to achieve this engagement.

Inductive Preaching

One way to engage the suspicions of the twenty-first-century listener is to use inductive, rather than deductive, preaching. The deductive approach, practiced widely over the last hundred years of modernity, involves stating, up front, the central or big idea as a declarative proposition, then proceeding to justify the claim. Inductive preaching, on the other hand, has been described in these terms, to “lay out the evidence, the examples, the illustrations and postpone the declarations and assertions until the listeners have a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications and then come to the conclusion with the preacher at the end of the sermon.”²

Johnson says that inductive preaching works from the particulars to the whole, from the unknown to the known, and employs four valuable elements.

1. It Involves the listener in learning. Since postmodern people are loathe to take anything on face value and want to be able to investigate and probe ideas, the inductive approach suits them. The approach starts where the listeners are, then leads them to draw their own conclusions from the

¹ Graham Johnston. Preaching to a Postmodern World (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2001) 151.

² Ibid.

evidence presented. The sermon itself becomes part of their experience, part of their familiar inductive learning style.

Johnson quotes Fred Craddock to stress the pitfalls of deductive preaching: “You leave your listeners in the pitiful box of having only two alternatives of agreeing or disagreeing with you. It’s all your work....But in inductive preaching, you unroll your idea in such a way that listeners have to work to get it themselves.”³

This work is one of joy for the listeners for “when a preacher actively engages the minds of the listeners, not only is their attention captured, but they receive more through the joy of discovery as opposed to having ideas merely handed to them.”⁴

2. Inductive preaching takes on a dialogical form. It tends to postpone pronouncements and assertions, instead using questions to stimulate thinking within the sermon. Johnston says this is key to preaching to postmoderns, so the preacher has to reorient his or her thinking from believing that the role of the sermon is to give answers, when really it’s to raise the right questions.

Postmoderns do not always want clear and concise answers to their questions. They often want a variety of options and conclusions to draw from in order to formulate a truth for themselves.

3. Inductive preaching starts the message where the people are. Jesus demonstrated this skill with the woman at the well, the healing of the

³ Ibid. 152.

⁴ Ibid.

paralytic, the tax collector, and Zaccheaus. Jesus worked from their understanding to the unrevealed world of the Father. Johnston points out that Biblical communicators aren't to impose the human dilemma upon the text but to uncover the human need that exists within each passage. "This taps into the idea of exercising intuitive thinking, which occurs when someone comes to accept an idea as true because it resonates with what's already known to be true."⁵ People, he says, are looking for inward truth. "As the world we once knew continues to crumble, listeners will cling to what they can personally affirm by their own experience and insight. When ideas ring true from the Bible, then people will grow to respect the Scripture as authoritative. That means people in postmodern times will need to be informed of the basic tenets of belief that undergird the Christian faith."⁶

The preacher needs to communicate to postmodern listeners that there is also objective truth, truth that is not founded upon feelings or what a person thinks truth comprises. Postmodern thinking is highly subjective. Therefore it is the work of the preacher to help the listener to see and hear both subjective and objective truth. The postmodern thinkers do not accept that truth is absolute but see a variety of truths constructed according to their own worldview.

⁵ Ibid, 153.

⁶ Ibid.

4. Inductive preaching keeps up the suspense so people will follow. One way this is accomplished is through what Eugene Lowry calls the “principle of reversal.” This is what he calls the “aha” moment in the sermon when one piece allows the whole puzzle to come into sharp focus. Such a revelatory clue is experienced by the congregation rather than simply being told what to believe.⁷

From scripture we can see an “aha” moment as an example of keeping suspense. In the parable of the two men who go to the temple to pray, Jesus pits the tax collector against the Pharisee, a clear moral mismatch if there ever was one. But Jesus pulls out the rug when he declares that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, was the one who went away forgiven by God. The listeners are startled because the message challenges their expectation by moving in an altogether different direction than they had anticipated. This holds attention as well as causes people to think carefully about the nature of what’s being said.

According to Johnston people of postmodern times consider the Bible old hat. He says, “If one can preach using this narrative device, it will prove to be a powerful way to connect God’s truth to their lives.”⁸

This blanket statement of Johnston’s does not consider postmodern people some kind of new breed of humanity, instead of being the very ordinary form of narcissism. It is understood that many people in every

⁷ Eugene L. Lowry. The Homiletical Plot (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 54.

⁸ Johnston. 154.

generation have considered the Bible “old hat,” who have never heard of postmodernism.

In concluding this discussion about inductive preaching Johnston says, “A good inductive sermon should awaken a conflict that’s real to the listener, then allow the weight of that tension to be felt before beginning to move toward resolution. Tension is the basis behind any good story; and yet is precisely what many sermons lack.”⁹

Along with inductive and deductive preaching other methods have been used in preaching. Textual, Topical and Narrative preaching methods have also been popular over the years. In recent years there has been a revival in the use of narrative preaching, defined as the sermon as story. This style of preaching is attractive to our highly visual and sensory audience.

Textual Preaching

Textual preaching sounds simple enough: the preacher announces a biblical text and then preaches on that text. A better definition of textual preaching has been put forth by Andrew Blackwood who says, “A textual sermon is one whose structure corresponds with the order of the parts in the text.”¹⁰ By using this method the textual sermon fixes attention on one part of the Scriptures. The sermon is comparatively easy to prepare because, once the preacher knows what the text means in its own setting, he/she should encounter few obstacles in helping the listener see the meaning of the text.

⁹ Ibid. page 155.

¹⁰ Michael Duduit. Handbook of Contemporary Preaching (Nashville:Broadman Press, 1992) 79.

Blackwood believes that textual preaching brings the hearer close to the heart of the Bible. 11 Along with Blackwood, Fred Craddock's work in this area has been significant.

I agree with Sidney Greidanus when he writes:

The term expository preaching cannot truly be contrasted with textual preaching or preaching on a single verse, since these terms describe preaching from different angles. Instead of contrasting these terms, therefore, one can easily combine them.... Textual preaching is preaching on a biblical text and expounds the message of that text. This definition implies that all textual preaching requires not only a text but also an exposition of that text. All textual preaching is therefore understood as expository preaching.¹²

Topical Preaching

Whereas the textual sermon begins with the text, the topical sermon begins with the listener, the world, and the issue. J. Daniel Baumann says, "Let us define a topical sermon as the elaboration of a topic, a textual sermon as the elaboration of a short text, and an expository sermon as the elaboration of a longer passage of Scripture." 13

Professor Francis Rossow calls topical preaching "free text preaching."

I call a sermon 'topical' when the preacher is free to choose a text from the Bible rather than preach on a passage assigned by the lectionary; when the preacher has an idea and then searches for a biblical text or texts treating that idea; even when the preacher writes on an assigned text but feels free to develop the sermon without rigid adherence to the structure of the text and without the compulsion to

11 Michael Dudit. Handbook of Contemporary Preaching. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.) 79.

12 Sidney Greidanus. The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 123.

13 Dudit. 85.

deal fully with every verse, phrase, or word in that text. He gives three advantages to this topical/free text preaching. The first is that it enables the pastor to preach on many homiletically rich texts in the Bible not covered by a lectionary system. The second is that a topical approach allows a pastor who has the ability and the necessary accompanying sense of responsibility – to use certain creative sermon formats – such as multiple text, literary genres, extended analogies, monologue, dialogue, letter formats – and to match such formats with texts compatible to these formats. The third is that the pastor may consult individuals or groups in the congregation for their input to the choice of sermon topics and sermon texts, thereby increasing the likelihood of subsequent sermons being relevant to individual and congregational needs.¹⁴

Professor Rossow may call this topical style “free text” but I believe that care must be taken to avoid mere “proof texting.” The great danger is preaching without referring to the text at all or preaching without solid biblical interpretation. There is also the danger of preaching “to tickle the ears of the listeners.” The preacher gives up preaching the whole counsel of God, preferring to preach sermons that are determined by the congregation in their desire to have their “felt need” met. Finally, the preacher can be tempted to preach only on texts which are safe and easily understood.

The value of topical preaching becomes evident when current issues demand attention. Even though the preacher is an expositor, the text under consideration has a particular topic that needs to be preached. Topical preaching speaks directly to cultural situations of the present day. The topical sermon will have a high degree of application which is so important in a

¹⁴ Ibid. 88.

society which is void of moral, ethical and theological understanding. One caution to the preacher is to guard against using the scriptures simply as a spring board to justify a position on a topic. The preacher must not allow the sermon topic to become his/her hobby horse, preaching for or against some particular social evil.

Narrative Preaching

One of the most popular methods of preaching in recent years is “narrative preaching.” Eugene Lowry has called narrative preaching “a primary preaching form. Narrative preaching as described by Lowry is not simply using stories and illustrations to make the sermon interesting, instructive, or challenging. Rather than containing stories, the sermon is the story from the outset to conclusion. The story binds the entire sermon to a single plot as theme.”¹⁵

There are five strengths and weaknesses of the narrative form.

The first and most notable strength of the narrative sermon is that it speaks in a natural way to the story of both Scripture and contemporary culture. Typical congregations nourished on years of television dramas and popular video releases have been groomed to relate to the narrative sermon.

A second value of the narrative sermon is that it contains a generous barb to snag the three-minute interest spans that currently church-goers bring to church with them. This three minute interest span is now compressed in a much shorter time increment. If the postmodern listener is not hooked in the

¹⁵ Ibid. page 103.

sermon in just a few seconds the attention needed to hear has moved on or clicked to another channel in the head of the hearer. Fred Craddock once remarked that “boredom is a form of evil.”¹⁶ Narrative sermons force our dull minds to pay attention to more ideas, arguments, and concepts, than many older sermon models.

A third strength of the narrative sermon is that it is less preachy to the “me generation” of today and the “we generation” that’s on the way. I would agree that the “we generation” is not so new, but reflects a clear stream of thought in the New Testament, in Paul’s great passages on the body-life of the church, which is far from being “me-orientated.”

A fourth strength of the narrative sermon has to do with the flow and fix of the sermon. By “flow” Miller means the smoothness of the sermon’s movement and by “fix” he refers to the memorability of the sermon. Stories have cadence and smoothness in delivery where so many sermons can be jerky, jolting the listener between its outline points.

The final strength of narrative preaching is its literary form and endurance. The sermon like a good story can last for a long time.

What are the weaknesses?

¹⁶ Fred B. Craddock. Overhearing the Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978) 12.

The first self-proclaimed weakness of the narrative sermon may be a thwarted induction. Some may not be motivated to see the connection between their own life story and that of the sermon.

A second weakness in a constant diet of narrative preaching is the loss of didache (or teaching) in the church. The sermon must teach. I agree with Calvin Miller that “many theologians are growing concerned that the church is losing the ability to define and defend its faith.”¹⁷

However, when we hear the sermons of Jesus from the gospels we find that they are easy to understand because many times he used stories to teach. His narrative blended humour when He painted a word picture of a person with a “log in the eye.” In the wonderful story of the prodigal Jesus describes the longing of the Heavenly Father, the slide into a sinful lifestyle, and the home coming of a sinner. In his narrative stories Jesus taught a number of lessons.

Miller refers to Achtemeier who cites C.H.Dodd’s Apostolic Preaching and its Documents by saying:

In my own Reformed tradition, the minister is appropriately known as the “teaching elder,” and under the rubric, he or she has two very important tasks. First of all, as the congregation’s church theologian, the minister has the task of educating the congregation in the central beliefs of Christianity. This is not a task that is performed only in confirmation class or in the church school. For far too long we have turned the responsibility for Christian education over to the Sunday school, with mixed results. Long before there was Sunday school, faithful clergy taught their congregations Christian

17 Dudit. 108.

theology in their Sunday sermons, and traditional Christian theology has been preserved in the church.

The third weakness of the narrative sermon is that it may suggest that the sermon exists to fascinate rather than change. The telling of a story to evoke an emotional response rather than to change a character or habit should be avoided.

A fourth weakness of the narrative sermon is that in every congregation there exists a strong percentage of souls whose life orientation is less story-oriented. The narrative sermon's inductive enticement may miss these altogether.

The fifth and final weakness is that narrative sermons go only as far as the imaginative capacities of the listener. "It should never be assumed that all narrative preaching leaves those who hear it resolved with total understanding."¹⁸

Seeker Sensitive Preaching

One of the desires of the postmodern church is to do effective outreach. Many churches are trying to reach the postmodern generation by creating services and preaching sermons for "seekers." "A seeker can be defined as a person who though not yet Christian, is generally receptive to the Christian faith."¹⁹ Preaching to "seekers" has moved away from expositional sermons to felt need sermons which are topical. The sermon does not take its root from the scriptures but from the felt needs of the listeners. There should be no such

¹⁸ Ibid. page 109.

¹⁹ Dennis M. Cahill. Can Expository Preaching Be Relevant for Both Believers and Seekers? Preaching Vol. 17 Nu. 6 May-June 2002. page 7.

conflict between 'felt needs' and relevant Biblical preaching. It has been my experience that by preaching a series of sermons or through a book or letter in the Bible people's felt needs are dealt with within the context of preaching.

The church or congregation is not strictly made up of "seekers" but also mature believers. Therefore I believe that preaching can be expository and at the same time reach the seeker, as expository preaching has for generations.

Expository Preaching

In defining expository preaching I have found two contemporary scholars of preaching most helpful. Haddon Robinson states, "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers."²⁰

Sidney Greidanus proposes the following definition: "Expository preaching is handling the text in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the overall context of scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers."²¹

Robinson and Greidanus agree that expository preaching has to do with exposing or explaining the meaning of the biblical passage. They both state that preaching involves applying the idea of the passage to a particular audience.

²⁰ Haddon Robinson. Biblical Preaching. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) 20.

²¹ Sidney Greidanus. The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).120.

Cahill says, "The essence of expository preaching is to explain the meaning of a passage or passages of scripture correctly understood in the particular context and in the broader context of scripture so that the scripture can be understood and applied by the hearer." 22

There is a strong basis for preaching to both believers and seekers. We should preach expository messages for both the committed believer and the curious seeker in order to fulfill the biblical mandates to preach the gospel to all people and to teach those who have already come to faith. This is the mandate of the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)

We should seek to preach to both believers and seekers for the rather obvious reason that both believers and seekers are present in our congregations. "Our understanding of the preaching task must be affected by our analysis of our audience. One of the major entrances into life and ministry of a church for seekers is by the invitation of friends or relatives. We should recognize that there is a multiplicity of groups making up any one congregation, those who have grown up in church and those who are new to the church and to the Bible; those who like contemporary music and those who like hymns; those who are more

22 Cahill. 8.

visual in their learning and those who are more linear.” Therefore our analysis of our congregation should always affect the way we preach.²³

Cahill notes five dangers of a Seeker-Sensitive approach to preaching.

1. There is the danger of inadequate exegesis and study of the text(s). Because preaching to seekers generally tends to be more topical, there is always the danger that the pressures of time will keep the preacher from a careful exegesis of scripture. It is hard enough to study one passage carefully, much less four or five passages.²⁴

Speaking of the difficulty of preaching from both an Old and New Testament text, Sidney Greidanus points out that the preacher “will have to do justice expositing not one but two texts in two entirely different historical settings.”²⁵

Seeker-sensitive preaching is concerned with being relevant and has a tendency to focus on story, image, illustration and application to such an extent that careful exegesis and interpretation are lost.

2. There is a danger of twisting the text to fit the topic. When we begin with a topic, there can be the temptation to twist the meaning of a text to fit the topic. This can lead to what is called the proof-text approach to Bible interpretation. This method, insofar as it ignores context, is completely inadequate. At its worst, it tends to treat the Bible as if it were a magical book or perhaps no more than an anthology of sayings for every occasion. The proof-text model often relies on a naïve reading of the text and is vulnerable to legalism, pop-psychology, spiritualization and other forms of quick and easy adjustments of the scriptural words to say what one wishes them to say in the contemporary scene, ignoring their intended

²³ Cahill. Page 9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Sidney Greidanus. Preaching Christ from the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) 43.

purpose and usage as determined by context, grammar and historical background. 26

3. There is a danger of not preaching on hard topics. One of the advantages of preaching through books of the Bible is that the preacher has to handle the difficult passages as they present themselves in the pages of scripture. In seeker-sensitive preaching there can be a tendency to stay away from the difficult passages that deal with morality, and such topics as abortion, homosexuality, the role of women in the church, and money. Many seeker sensitive churches do address these issues but do so in a way that communicates well with seekers.
4. There is the danger of failing to address the issues of biblical theology. One of the main principles of postmodernism is tolerance. The word theology or doctrine can give the idea of intolerance which is unacceptable to the postmoderns. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "It is grossly irresponsible for a preacher to moralize on isolated texts and to convey the notion that the real issue is finding self-esteem, happiness, health, self-fulfillment or any other desirable quality of life, as if these were valuable in themselves. All these good qualities need to be put in perspective through the gospel and its framework of salvation history."²⁷ Preaching for seekers, if it is to be expository, must take the progressive nature of scripture into account. This means that expository sermons must speak to the culture that is always changing.
5. There is a danger of producing moralizing sermons. These are sermons that give "five ways to overcome anger" or "six benefits of reading the Bible" etc. This type of sermon can give the impression that Christianity is a matter of following a number of rules or principles. These sermons often fail to be truly Christ-centered focusing on issues without any reference to the word of God.

None of these dangers need be fatal. Cahill reminds us, "The expository preacher who desires to speak to seekers will be aware of the dangers and will carefully avoid them. The careful preacher will not stay out in the deep water of

26 Ibid.

27 Graeme Goldsworthy. Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) 79-80.

irrelevance but will navigate carefully through the treacherous waters to the fertile shores of both careful interpretation and relevant application.”²⁸

Even though there are many dangers in preaching to seekers there are a number of principles which can help the preacher to apply effectively the message to both seekers and mature believers. Cahill gives eight principles:

1. Preaching to the overlap. There are passages and topics which are of interest to everyone. Seekers care about prayer; they are interested in having a successful marriage. This is preaching to the overlap, the intersection of interests between believers and those who are not yet believers. Preaching to seekers is not purely evangelistic preaching, but will include an introduction to basic Christian teachings which relates to the issues of our day.
2. Preaching that is overheard. A sermon cannot always be directed to everyone. Expository sermons for believers and seekers explain what the Christian life looks like. They directly and indirectly say “Here is what real Christianity looks like!”
3. Preaching in the vernacular. At the core of preaching to seekers is using the common language of the day. When we preach for seekers, we must avoid church or theological language or at least define our terms. At the heart of expository preaching for seekers is not their approval but clarity. Clarity comes through using language the listener can understand.
4. Preaching topics and passages. Preaching for seekers is often topical by using several passages of scripture without exploration; there is a danger of using the word of God out of biblical context just to prove a point. Cahill says, “But preaching for seekers does not have to be topical. It is quite possible to preach relevant sermons from a single passage and it is probably best to do so as often as possible.”²⁹
5. Preaching in context. Preaching to seekers should give enough of the biblical context so that listeners over a period of time can gain an understanding of biblical theology and can learn how to understand the Bible for themselves. This helps to re-enforce the idea that the Bible is the source and authority for preaching.

Robinson explains that the preacher should present “enough of his study to the congregation so that a listener may check the interpretations himself.” He goes on to say, “Effective expository preaching requires listeners with ears to hear. Since their souls depend upon it, a preacher

²⁸ Cahill. Page 10.

²⁹ Ibid., 11.

must offer his hearers sufficient information to decide if what they are hearing is what the Bible actually says.”³⁰

6. Preaching which answers objections. Preaching is in many ways a dialogue. As we preach our listeners are engaged with us in a conversation, asking questions and raising objections. Seekers engage in this activity probably more than Christians do. Part of the preacher’s responsibility is to anticipate and answer the objections of both believers and seekers.
7. Preaching to the bottom line. People in general and seekers in particular are impatient to get the point. Johnston says that “postmodernity prefers the ‘just give me the facts’ preaching.”³¹ In the narrative the facts are found in the story where the seeker comes to what Lowry describes as the “aha” moment, the moment of understanding. In inductive method the facts can be made in point form with the use of the text. The bottom line has to flow from the text; it must have theological and biblical integrity, but it also has to be practical. Preaching to seekers must be useful preaching, preaching with purpose and application.
8. Preaching to seekers means preaching Christ. The Apostle Paul writes, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2 NIV). Greidanus argues that this does not mean narrowly focusing on the cross but also includes his life, teaching and works. And so Greidanus defines preaching Christ as “preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work and or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.”³²

An Integrative Model for Preaching

For many preachers deciding which style of preaching serves the best needs of the listener and the best method of sermon preparation and delivery is difficult. Textual, topical, narrative, seeker sensitive and expository sermons are all valid, but how does one choose? If expository preaching can be understood as a basic philosophy then the preacher can chose any style so long as the background work is done on the text. Kenton Anderson has developed a model

30 Robinson. 23.

31 Johnson. 143.

32 Greidanus. Preaching Christ from the Old Testament. 10.

by bringing together seemingly contrary options in such a way that the integrity of each remains uncompromised. He calls this model “Integrative Preaching” with the task of “helping people hear from God.”³³ This model is based on two primary issues to the task of preaching. The first matter is that of authority. Listeners today come ready-built with their own authority. The first task of the preacher is to provide warrant for his or her claim. The postmodern listener believes in the individual’s own authority and when confronted with preaching may respond with the accusation, “Oh, yeah, who says?” At this point the preacher must make an authority level choice between text and today, between divine authority and human authority. Culture should never trump the Word of God. Culture is constantly changing but the Word of God endures forever.

The second primary concern for the preacher is to discover the most effective means of helping the listener own the truth. Apprehension is the taking hold of a truth, or getting a grip on the message being offered. This apprehension takes place in the head and in the heart.

Traditionally, preachers have emphasized the cognitive path, explaining the propositions of the text and sermon, making things clear and making things orderly. The idea is that the truth is made comprehensible in the mind, the listener will be compelled to respond and the preacher will have done his or her job. Today, however, preachers are discovering or rediscovering intuitive experience as an avenue to listener understanding of truth. Gripping stories and emotional appeals compel a listener to want to respond to the message being

³³ Kenton C. Anderson. Preaching With Conviction (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001) 67.

preached. Whether the propositions can be explained is less important when a listener feels a need to respond.

“Integrative preaching, then, is about bringing together things like head and heart; text and today, without sacrificing the integrity of either concern.”³⁴

In the model of integrative preaching there are a number of steps in the preaching process. (See Integrative Preaching Circle in Appendix) First, the preacher’s task is to engage the listener. Preachers should never assume that the people in the pew come to church with a deep desire to listen to a sermon. The listener who is skeptical brings to church the first question that needs to be answered, “So What?” To answer this question the preacher must tell the story of the text. Every text has a story. The Bible is populated with real human beings who are going through almost all of the sorts of things the listener experiences. Working with the humanity who populate the text will give the listeners people with whom they can identify. This makes the Bible relevant to the listener.

The preacher’s second task is to teach the listener. In this stage the preacher answers the question “What’s What? What is the point that the preacher wants the listener to understand? Haddon Robinson calls this the “Big Idea.”

Thirdly, the preacher’s task is to help the listener struggle through the natural objections of the text. Just because the preacher makes a point doesn’t mean everyone will respond to it. The listener at this stage will ask “Yeah but...” which means there is a problem coming from the text. The preacher

needs to ask, “What’s the problem?” The Bible is profoundly counter-cultural. If a preacher offers biblical truth with honesty and integrity, there will be inherent conflict in the engagement with contemporary listener presuppositions. Acknowledging the problem from the perspective of the thinking human will be important if we care about listener comprehension and assent. The preacher needs to inquire into the listener’s deep-seated objections and assumptions. What obstacle needs to be overcome to get the listener to say, “Yeah, okay, I’m ready to respond.”³⁵

The preacher’s final operation is to help the listener imagine possibilities that could arise out of obedience to God’s call in the sermon. At this stage the preacher must integrate today and the heart. This forms the preacher’s answer to the question, “What’s the difference?” There ought always to be a difference. We should never imagine that preaching is merely a matter of education or entertainment. The preacher must desire to see things happen by God’s grace and for his glory.

With these four questions the preacher is able to construct the sermon. The four questions being What’s the Story? What’s the Point? What’s the Problem? And what’s the difference? To simplify the questions in order to help the memory four words that begin with the letter “P” have been helpful. The word “Passage” brings to memory the question “What’s the Story?” The word “Point” is a reminder that the preacher has to come up with the point of the text. In most sermons there is usually a situation or problem that needs to be

³⁴ Kenton C. Anderson. Preaching With Integrity. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003) 111.
³⁵ Ibid. 114.

encountered; therefore the word “Problem” is used to remind the preacher to search out the problem in the text or in the life of the listener, to which the sermon is directed. Finally the sermon has to make some difference in the life of the listener, so the question is asked “How will believing what the preacher has just said, “Profit” my life? What has been gained from listening to the sermon that will be productive in living the Christian life?

The model of Integrative Preaching that has been used is a series of four sermons with accompanying evaluations forms. (See appendix 1 and 3) These sermons were evaluated by individuals from the congregation of Aeon Baptist Church. I chose people from my own congregations because they are the people who know my life and character. They are the people that come and listen week after week. They understand that honesty and forthrightness were needed, so that the process would be valuable to them as hearers and to their pastor as preacher. The persons evaluating have come from a wide range of ages and experiences. One is a male high school student who has become a believer in this past year. He comes with a young postmodern context, with questions that require truthful answers. Another is a female nurse who has been our Sunday School Superintendent. She faces life and death every day and is not satisfied with simple answers to complicated issues. The third person recruited is a husband, father of two, a school teacher and a lay preacher. He is in his early forties, holding strong opinions and a background in the Roman Catholic Church. The fourth participant is a housewife who worked for many years in senior citizens’ homes and has been a member of a number of Convention

churches. She has had the opportunity to listen to a number of preachers in the Atlantic Baptist Convention over the years. The fifth evaluator is a “baby boomer” who comes from a variety of experiences and settings. He is an owner of a local antique business who has lived in different provinces of Canada. He was on staff at Trinity Western University and has had many years of experience in the local church in a number of denominations. The sixth evaluator is the chairperson of the Board of Deacons of Aenon Baptist Church. He is involved in a team ministry with his wife as youth leader at Aenon Baptist; and finally a young woman in her thirties, wife, mother of two young boys, who owns and operates an interior decorating business, and has a university degree. This group is very diverse and their evaluations have been very open and honest.

These individuals used an evaluation form (see appendix 2) developed by Anderson. From the forms the preacher has the opportunity to examine the integrative preaching model. The evaluation form is broken down into the four areas of the sermon and preaching moment. These areas will be listed and examined individually with the comments that have come from the sermon team of listeners at Aenon Baptist Church.

The evaluation form for the thesis project comes in two parts. One form is arranged in a circle diagram which can be used by the preacher as he/she puts the sermon together. The second form uses a series of statements based on the circle diagram. The evaluators used the evaluation statements with a grading system. The grid for grading goes from a poor designation (1) to an excellent grade of (5).

Following is the description of the four quarters of the sermon preparation diagram used by the preacher and evaluation comments on a Father's Day sermon. (See: Appendix 3 for evaluation and sermon.) The appendix 3 also contains copies of the four sermons with their evaluative comments at the end of the sermon.

1. "So What": Creating an Experience of the Text.

In the telling of the story it is important to gain the listener's interest immediately. This is done by becoming emotionally engaging. In this model this can take place by using a story, usually a retelling of the scripture text to be preached. This is to help the listener to identify with the people and issues of the original Bible. In this introductory segment of the sermon the preacher must also make good eye contact with the congregation appearing comfortable and confident.

The evaluators are to answer three statements: The preacher quickly aroused my interest. I was emotionally engaged in the sermon. The preacher helped me identify with the people and issue of the original Bible story.

2. "What's the Point? Struggling with the Implications of the Listener's Perspective.

This is the place for explanation - just enough explanation as necessary to inform the listener's mind without bogging him/her down with confusing details. The challenge is to be clear and intellectually stimulating.

The preacher must make a significant point that is faithful to the Biblical passage and relevant to the life of the listener. It must be compelling, not shallow and simplistic.

3. What's the Problem" or "Now What": Motivating a Significant Life Response.

In this third move the preacher acknowledges the listener's objections, seeking to overcome the inevitable reticence the listener will harbor. Minds don't change without a fight. Preachers that can get under the surface and deal with the real cognitive objections of the listener will speak powerfully.

In this section the preacher must struggle with the implications from the listener's perspective. One of the difficulties with this section is that the statements to be evaluated are very subjective. And this was borne out in the answers given by most of the participants. The most difficult statement for evaluation was "The preacher 'read my mind,' taking seriously my honest objections and concerns." It is most difficult, if not impossible, to read another's mind. There have been times at the end of a sermon when a listener may respond at the door to the sermon by saying, "You read my mind." In my estimation this happens when the preacher understands both the biblical world and the contemporary world of their hearers. If preachers have done their homework they should be able to demonstrate some understanding of the minds and hearts of their congregations. This is not to

say that there is no room for the working of the Holy Spirit in the understanding of the sermon.

4. "What's the Difference?" or "Now What?"

The preacher now offers the possibility of a tangible alternate future according to the call of the gospel. The goal is to preach for a life changing moment in the life of the listener.

The goal for the preacher is to give value to the listener, not to abuse the listener or make him/her feel manipulated. The challenge for the preacher is to help the listener imagine the change that will take place in a life that responds obediently to God. Preachers must preach for change.

The final aspect of the evaluation form dealt with the listener's evaluation of the preacher's eye contact, appearance of comfort, ability and confidence. The evaluation for the above mentioned categories was excellent. The preacher did come across to the congregation as confident, comfortable, and competent.

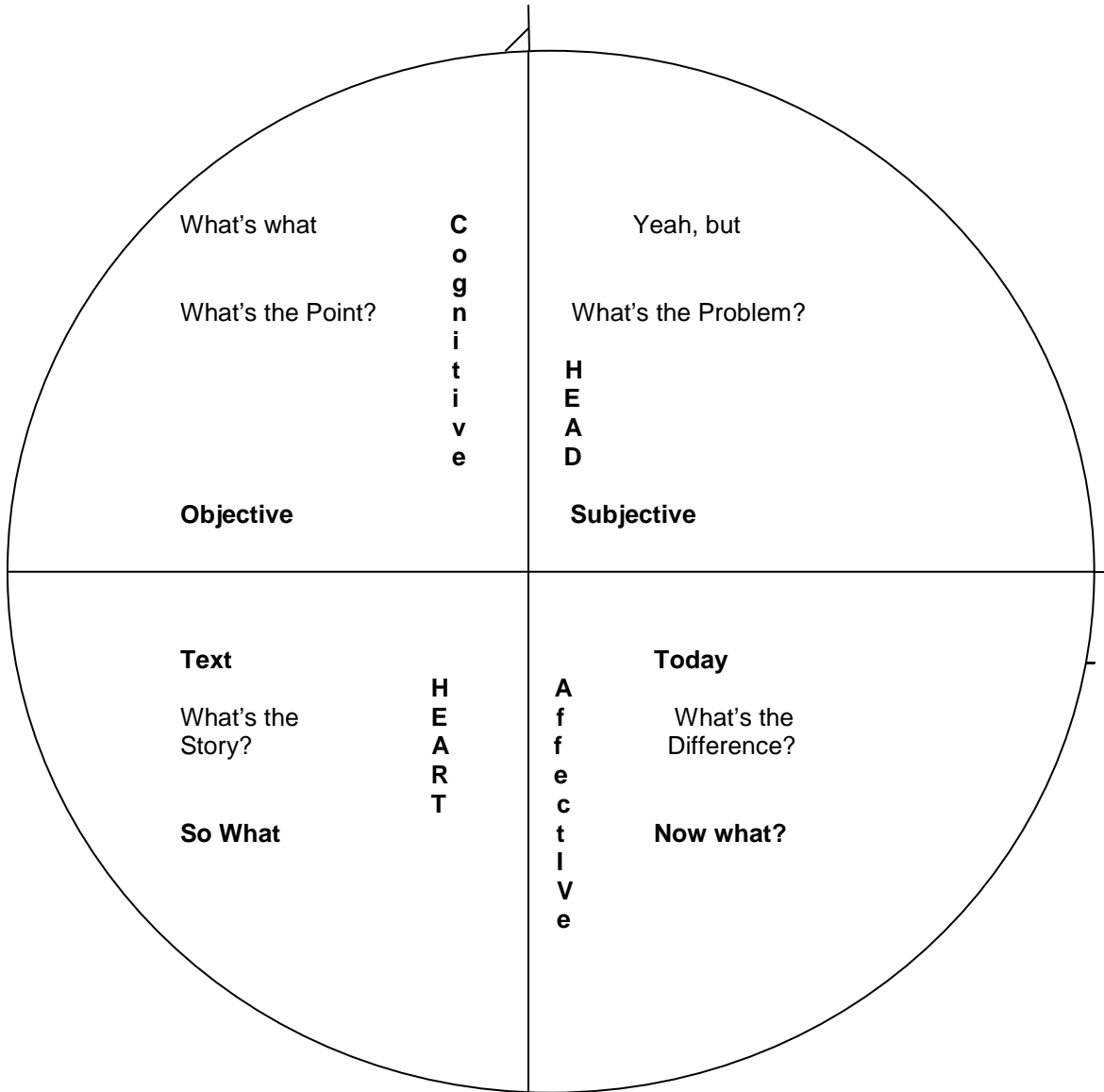
Using the Integrative Preaching Model has been a good experience. I will continue to use this method as I preach a variety of sermons, with the underlying philosophy that every sermon is an expository sermon.

When I have used this model in sermon preparation and finished the manuscript I have had the confidence that the message to be preached will be acceptable to the Lord and to the congregation. This model is not etched in stone but continues to be refined. The most encouraging aspect of this

thesis is to see myself become more passionate at what God has called me to do, "Preach the Word."

Integrative Preaching

What's The Big Idea?



APPENDEX 2

Evaluation Form

Preacher: _____

Date: _____ Bible Text: _____

Please evaluate the presentation based on the following issues and concerns (1=poor 5=excellent). Feel free to add any appropriate comments.

“So What”: Creating an Experience of the Text: Poor – Exc.

The preacher quickly aroused my interest. I was emotionally engaged in the sermon. 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher helped me identify with the people and issues of the original Bible story. 1 2 3 4 5

“What’s What” : Offering an Explanation of the Text:

The preacher had significant point, faithful to the Biblical passage and relevant to my life. 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher’s explanation were clear and compelling, not shallow and simplistic. 1 2 3 4 5

“Yeah, But” : Struggling with the Implications from the Listener’s Perspective.

The preacher wouldn’t let me off easily, but helped me consider deeper implications. 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher “read my mind,” taking seriously my honest objections and concerns. 1 2 3 4 5

“Now What”: Motivating a Significant Life Response

The preacher helped me imagine how this message could change my world. 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher made me want to respond obediently to whatever God was calling me. 1 2 3 4 5

Further Issues in Preaching.

The preacher looked me in the eye and appeared comfortable and confident throughout 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher appeared to value me as a listener. I did not feel abused or manipulated. 1 2 3 4 5

I would summarize the point of the message in the following sentence:

Other Comments?

Sermon 1 and Evaluation.

SERMON: FOOD WITH AN ATTITUDE

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 6:41-59

INTRODUCTION: At their busy stock brokerage, John Hunt knows that it is hard to find time for small talk. So he was caught off guard when a co-worker leaned over to him and asked, "What's up John?"

Welcoming a brief break, John told him about his hectic weekend and the trouble he was having with his car. The co-worker seemed a little distracted, however. After their conversation ended, John saw him lean over to another colleague, "Hey, Robert," he said, "What's the ticker symbol for 'Upjohn' pharmaceuticals?"

Have you ever had trouble understanding what was going on? We all have times when we didn't quite understand what was said. The other evening we were all talking in the kitchen. I heard myself say something profound during the discussion. Then Kristy said, 'Oh, dad, we left that topic five minutes ago.'

People were having a difficult time understanding Jesus. He had just made an unusual and extraordinary claim about himself. Here in chapter six Jesus claimed to be God by using the phrase, "I am the Bread of Life." Later Jesus would go on to say, 'I am the light of the world.' "I am the door." "I am the good shepherd." "I am the resurrection and the life." "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "I am the true vine." All of these "I am" statements were proclamations of His deity, of who He is, He is God.

1. COMPLIANT ABOUT JESUS. (41-42)

Then the people began to murmur in disagreement because he had said, "I am the bread from heaven." [42] They said, "This is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his father and mother. How can he say, 'I came down from heaven?'"

There was confusion running among the people who heard Jesus say, "I am the Bread of Heaven." He had set himself up for criticism for being the real thing.

There is an old story of a woman who made artificial fruits so perfectly that people could not tell them from the real fruit. But she had some critics who would find fault with the shape of the fruit, the color, and other things. One day as the critics stood before a table on which she had placed several pieces of fruit, they criticized particularly one apple. "It looked to artificial," they said. When they had finished, the woman picked up the apple, cut it in half, and began to eat it. It was the real thing, an apple.

Some of the people may not have liked what Jesus said, or how He said it, but that didn't matter. What did matter is the truth. But the people did not believe Him.

His critics base their disagreement on their knowledge of Him. They felt His claims were outrageous. After all, Jesus was one of them. He grew up in Nazareth. He was the ordinary son of Mary and Joseph.

Their familiarity with Jesus made his statements contemptuous.

2. CONVERSION THROUGH JESUS. (42-47)

In verses 43-47 Jesus makes a great comeback.

[43] But Jesus replied, "Don't complain about what I said. [44] For people can't come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them from the dead. [45] As it is written in the Scriptures, 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me. [46] (Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from God, have seen him.) [47] "I assure you, anyone who believes in me already has eternal life.

In His comeback Jesus brings His Heavenly Father into the conversation.

The grumblers don't understand because they are not connected. We all like to feel independent. We like to think that when it comes to our relationship with God that it is all about us. That we are somehow in charge of our conversion experience and our commitment to Christ.

Ray Stedman tells this story. A woman was raised in a non-religious family and had never gone to church. When she was in high school, Billy Graham held his first crusade in Sacramento. She was invited by some of her friends to go hear him. She listened to the choir, to the testimonies and the special music, and she said to herself, 'I know this man is using this to manipulate these people. He is psychologically preparing them to respond to an invitation.' She felt very confident that she could withstand what she considered to be manipulation because she knew exactly what he was doing. But then Billy Graham gave the invitation, and she said, "I was the first one to respond! I jumped out of my seat and went down immediately. I was embarrassed because, as I walked down, I saw that I was the very first person to respond."

Do you know why? She was drawn by the Father and she believed.

Jesus tells us that the Father does a number of things when it comes to salvation.

- **The Heavenly Father draws people to trust Jesus.** This drawing is what Peter described a couple of weeks ago as "the door was opened and I was

sucked in.” The drawing is experiencing the “irritable love of God through Christ.” It’s taking that step of faith and not knowing why except you have too.

Jesus says in John 17:24 “Father, *I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory...*”

- The Heavenly Father speaks to people about trusting Jesus.

I believe God speaks today. He can speak from the mighty winds, he can speak through the thunder, but He speaks loudest through the quiet or still small voice that speaks to our hearts and minds. He speaks to us about trusting his son for salvation and eternal life.

- The Heavenly Father teaches people about trusting Jesus.

Jesus says, we are to learn from the Father. God is our teacher. Every lesson we need to live the life He intends for us it taught by Him. Especially the lessons about living for Christ.

3. CONTENTMENT THROUGH JESUS. (48-51)

[48] Yes, I am the bread of life! [49] Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. [50] However, the bread from heaven gives eternal life to everyone who eats it. [51] I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; this bread is my flesh, offered so the world may live."

Contentment comes when we believe that Jesus is the Living Bread or Living God.

I think one of the reasons that Christians don’t experience contentment in their walk with Jesus, is because we are so full of ourselves. We plan our days as if Jesus didn’t exist. We go about our business, our work, our schooling as if Jesus’ was somehow outside of our lives. Contentment comes, I believe when we are emptied of self, and full of Jesus.

How do we fill ourselves with Jesus. By spending time with Him in prayer, but filling our minds with the Word of God. By fellowshiping with like minded believers. By spending time with people who also desire to be filled with His spirit.

This contentment or salvation is universally offered. Jesus offered himself on the cross so that the whole world might come to faith. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.*

4. CONSTRAINTION ABOUT JESUS. (52)

[52] Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

Throughout the century's popes, theologians, church councils, pastors, people and denominations have argued about the true meaning of these words.

Should they be taken literally?

The Catholic Church teaches a theory called "transubstantiation" which means that when the bread and cup is lifted by the priest and prayed over, the elements become real flesh and blood upon consumption. For Catholics communion is a sacrament, giving the elements special saving power or a means of grace to those who partake.

Protestant churches do not believe this theory. Lutheran and Anglican believe that communion is a sacrament and holds special spiritual powers for those who take it.

In Baptist churches we believe that the bread remains bread, the juice remains juice. The elements do not have any special saving power. They are emblems used as our Lord directed, "Do this in remembrance of Me." Communion is a special memorial time. Communion is a time of reflection, confessing our sins to God, confirmation of our faith through forgiveness and a spiritual meal depicting the church of Jesus Christ living in harmony and love with one another.

Our communion with Christ is not through the elements but through the Spirit. We partake together at the Lord's Table a spiritual meal to strengthen our spiritual walk.

5. COMMUNION THROUGH JESUS. (53-59)

[53] So Jesus said again, "I assure you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. [54] But those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them at the last day. [55] For my flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink. [56] All who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them. [57] I live by the power of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, those who partake of me will live because of me. [58] I am the true bread from heaven. Anyone who

eats this bread will live forever and not die as your ancestors did, even though they ate the manna."

[59] He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

The Benefits to the believer in their communion with Christ:

- Communion with Jesus leads to a professed life.
- Communion with Jesus leads to a powerful life.
- Communion with Jesus leads to a resurrected life.
- Communion with Jesus leads to everlasting life.

The Benefits of the church in it's communion with Christ.

- Discipleship – becoming a learner as together we grow in Christ.
- Stewardship – developing a giving heart as one gives to Christ's church.
- Fellowship – we are joined to on another in Christ's body the church.
- Worship – where two or more are gathered Christ is in the midst.

Conclusion: As we come together for the Communion Service may we be reminded that Jesus is "The Bread of Life." From Him we nourish our souls so that we might follow His will, and be faithful to His body the church. Amen.

Evaluation Form

Preacher: Rev. Leo Gallant

Date: June 6/04 Bible Text: John 6:41-59

Please evaluate the presentation based on the following issues and concerns (1=poor 5=excellent). Feel free to add any appropriate comments.

“So What”: Creating an Experience of the Text: Poor – Exc.

The preacher quickly aroused my interest. I was emotionally engaged in the sermon. 1 2 3 4 5

Sermon moved quickly through material hard to get emotionally involved.

The preacher helped me identify with the people and issues of the original Bible story. 1 2 3 4 5

Good but again too much material perhaps; slow down a little emphasis fewer points.

“What’s What” : Offering an Explanation of the Text:

The preacher had significant point, faithful to the Biblical passage and relevant to my life. 1 2 3 4 5

Biblical knowledge and relevancy was very good.

The preacher’s explanation were clear and compelling, not shallow and simplistic. 1 2 3 4 5

Could be a little more compelling – not too deep for average person in audience. Good example of church testimony that we could relate to.

“Yeah, But” : Struggling with the Implications from the Listener’s Perspective.

The preacher wouldn’t let me off easily, but helped me consider deeper implications. 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher “read my mind,” taking seriously my honest objections and concerns. 1 2 3 4 5

Difficult question to understand and apply to sermon.

“Now What”: Motivating a Significant Life Response

The preacher helped me imagine how this message could change my world. 1 2 3 4 5

General – not specific to me and that would be tough one in short sermon.

The preacher made me want to respond obediently to whatever God was calling me. 1 2 3 4 5

Used good humor and the example of to make the point. Liked D-day example of being on the front line.

Further Issues in Preaching.

The preacher looked me in the eye and appeared comfortable and confident throughout 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher appeared to value me as a listener. I did not feel abused or manipulated. 1 2 3 4 5

I would summarize the point of the message in the following sentence:

Other Comments?

Sermon – points well made and right on target. Moved a little too quickly through the sermon. Form good over all but could use work.

Sermon 2 and Evaluation.

Date: June 13, 2004

SERMON: FOLLOWING JESUS.

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 6:60-71

INTRODUCTION: In the summer of 1973 I was a summer assistant pastor at the Wesleyan Church on Windsor Street, Halifax. One of my ministries was to spend some time with the youth. It was a small group of about eight to ten young people. One Saturday the group was going to spend part of the day at the Centennial swimming pool. As the afternoon went on someone had the bright idea that I should show no fear and climb to the highest diving platform and jump into the pool. Silly old me took up the challenge but realized with each step fear began to take hold of me. At the top I noticed a line drawn across the diving platform. I realized that it was for me the point of no return. I kept saying, 'Don't look down, Don't look down.' I looked down. In that moment I had a decision to make. I could climb down the latter slowly to immerse myself in embarrassment or cross the point of no return, jump for the journey downward would only take a couple of seconds and I could enjoy the glory of victory, never to be experienced again. I jumped.

The followers of Jesus faced a point where a decision had to be made. Jesus' ministry had become popular. He performed a number of healings. He produced wine at a wedding banquet. He fed 5,000 plus people with two fish and five barley loaves. He showed his power over nature by doing the impossible; he could walk on water and calm the storms. Many people were beginning to believe in him and some wanted to make him King.

Then Jesus began to talk about what it would mean to truly follow Him. He talked about his flesh being real food and his blood being real drink. He was telling the people that to be a true follower one must partake of His sufferings. To be a follower meant something more than having a full stomach and freedom from the Romans. Following Jesus meant and means accepting some difficult principles, it means thinking in a different way. It means looking at life from a spiritual point of view and not just from a physical viewpoint. Following Jesus is crossing the point of no return and stepping out in faith.

1. FOLLOWING JESUS INVOLVES **CONFUSION AND CONFLICT (60)**

Following Jesus when he was popular with the crowds must have been an exciting time. Every day the disciples must have wondered, "what new miracle is going to happen?" What would Jesus say that would inspire them to follow?

Everything was exciting then Jesus said, “I am the bread of heaven” “I am the living bread.” ‘I am the true bread from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever....”

Jesus’ words created confusion and conflict within the hearts of the followers of Jesus.

It is difficult sometimes to follow the teachings of Jesus. Jesus tells us that we are to turn the other cheek when we have been hurt. If we have been wrongfully accused we are to forgive. When we have been spitefully treated we are not to retaliate. We are not only to love our family and friends, we are to love and pray for our enemies. We are to give to the poor and teith our incomes to the church. We are to follow Jesus’ commands and walk by faith.

Why did Jesus’ words cause many of his followers to desert him?

1. They may have realized that he wasn’t going to be the conquering Messiah-King they expected. So Jesus was not going to live up to their expectations they left.
2. He refused to give in to their self-centered request. He would not do for them what they wanted in providing for their material needs.
3. He emphasized faith, not deeds.
4. His teachings were difficult to understand, and some of his words were offensive.

As we grow in our faith, we may be tempted to turn away because Jesus’ lessons are difficult. Will your response to be to give up, ignore the teachings, or reject Christ? Instead, ask God to show you what the teachings mean and how they apply to your life. Then have the courage to act on God’s truth.

Jesus’ words brought confusion and conflict in the heart of Jesus’ followers so in verse 61 we see that following Jesus involves confrontation.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS INVOLVES **CONFRONTATION**. (61-65)

Looking into their hearts Jesus knew that his disciples were complaining. When Jesus was talking to his disciples he was not just taking to the chosen twelve. As Jesus’ popularity grew so did the number of the followers or disciples. At one point in his ministry Jesus commissioned some 120 followers to go out to preach and heal.

Jesus needed to confront his followers. They were still thinking with their stomach, there understanding of Jesus was that He was their provider and they

enjoyed His popularity. Jesus had no time for groupies. Those who follow Jesus in hopes of feeling good will always be disappointed sooner or later.

I can see the discussion. The disciple's complaint concerned their own willingness to follow Jesus but they want something in return. Their human effort must stand for something.

To me verse 63 is very powerful, *"It is the Spirit who give eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing."*

Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8-9 echo the words of Jesus, *"God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."*

3. FOLLOWING JESUS INVOLVES **COMMITMENT** (66-67)

Standing over the edge of the diving platform I realized that once committed there was no turning back. The moment I would step from the safety of the platform faith would have to overcome fear.

One of the things that has always been heavy on my heart are folks who I have know and loved who for a while, and some time for many years professed the name of Jesus. People who were involved in a local church ministries. People who professed openly their love for Jesus but are now living as they once did in the world.

It is the parable of the seed and the sower reminds us that seed fell on hard ground and did not grow, seed fell in the rocks grew momentarily and died. Seed fell into thorns grew but was choked to death. The only seed that grew and prospered fell on rich, prepared soil.

Jesus also said that many commitments do not survive the test of love. In Luke 14:25 we read, Jesus said, *"All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not do what I say...."*

It is true that when it comes to providing salvation God has done it all through His son Jesus. God in his wisdom desires that we come to Him by faith.

We come to Jesus in obedience to the calling of the Holy Spirit. It is like He draws a line in the sands of life and we take the step of faith. Not a step into some great unknown darkness but a step into His glorious presence. Thus we have His presence with us every day.

Obedience is the way to commitment. It is through obedience that Jesus will often separate the false follower from the committed companion. ”

Following Jesus involves commitment.

4. FOLLOWING JESUS INVOLVES **CONVICTION**. (68-69)

For someone to be obedient and committed one must have a conviction, a truth that some would die for.

Perhaps some of you watched the TV movie about D-Day called IKE. The movie portrayed the struggles of Dwight David Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the allied forces in Europe in World War 2. In one of the scenes he is talking to his officers and trying to find a way to motivate the troops who will be going ashore in Northern France at D-Day. In this conversation he says, *“I will not ask our boys to go to a foreign shore to die for people who they do not know, who speak a language they do not understand, but I will ask them to fight for freedom.”* It was this conviction that the soldiers D-Day had committed their lives too, and many paid the supreme sacrifice.

Verse 66 tells us that *“At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the twelve and asked, “Are you going to leave too?”*

I believe that He knew their answer; in fact He knew that one Judas was in their midst but the question had to be asked for the disciples’ sake. Jesus was also showing them that he was not taking their faith for granted.

Jesus never tried to repel people with his teachings. He simply told the truth. The more the people heard Jesus’ real message, the more they divided into two camps - the honest seekers wanting to understand more, and those rejecting Jesus because they didn’t like what they heard.

Peter’s answer was straightforward. *“Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. We believe them, and we know you are the Holy One of God.”*

These words parallel with Matthew 16:16; Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20 where Peter answers Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter replies with great conviction “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.”

Peter answered Jesus’ question in verse 68 from his own understanding. He calls Jesus “Lord.” This was not an easy thing to say, for in ancient days, to say anything other than “Caesar is Lord” could cost you your life.

Peter also understood that Jesus was the answer to one of life's greatest question. Is there anything after death?

While I was traveling this week I listened to the CBC. Life after death was the topic. Everyone had an opinion. One suggested that life goes on only in the memory of others. Another suggested that life goes on as a though triggered by a smell or physical feeling. No one gave as good and truthful answer as Peter. For he understood that Jesus was the Lord, the giver of eternal life.

This was Peter's conviction, a conviction that eventually he would die for. Finally we see that our conviction, what we believe has consequences.

5. FOLLOWING JESUS INVOLVES **CONSEQUENCES**. (70-71)

There are only two kinds of people in the world. There are believers and betrayers.

There are those who believe that Jesus is Lord and live a life of obedience and love. Then there are those who deny any and all the ways God reveals Himself to human kind.

Driving Kristy to Camp Medley we traveled the beautiful Saint John River. We both remarked at the beauty of the lush trees and pastures and marveled at God's work.

I don't know how anyone can look at the blue sky, the vastness of the ocean, and the beauty that surrounds us and say that there is no God. How can a person look at the face of a baby and say that the babies' beauty is "random chance." By doing so, I believe they are betraying the creative nature of God.

When people scoff at the Word of God, reject it as myth, they are living a life of betrayal. When people hear the gospel and walk away, they are betraying the Lord.

CONCLUSION: In response to Jesus' message, some people left; others stayed and truly believed; and some like Judas, stayed but tried to use Jesus for personal gain. Many people today turn away from following Christ. Some pretend to follow, going to church for status, approval of family and friends, or business contacts. But there are only two real responses to Jesus – you either accept him or reject Him. How have you responded to Christ?

Perhaps today you are standing in a place where you have to make a decision. You have been called by God, you have the conviction that He is Lord but you have never made the commitment, or you have never made it publicly. You can step back, the decision is yours. Or you can take the step of faith, only to experience a new life that is found in Christ.

If it is your desire to take that step of faith and by doing so you are saying to God and to us who are here that you will not, cannot, deny Jesus the Lord of your life. I am going to ask you to come to the front and stand with me. We will pray a prayer of commitment so that you might become a follower of Jesus Christ.

Evaluation Form

Preacher: Rev. Leo Gallant

Date: June 13, 2004 Bible Text: John 6: 60-71

Please evaluate the presentation based on the following issues and concerns (1=poor 5=excellent). Feel free to add any appropriate comments.

“So What”: Creating an Experience of the Text: Poor – Exc.

The preacher quickly aroused my interest. I was emotionally engaged in the sermon. 1 2 3 4 5

The preacher helped me identify with the people and issues of the original Bible story. 1 2 3 4 5

Good but again too much material perhaps; slow down a little emphasis fewer points.

“What’s What” : Offering an Explanation of the Text:

The preacher had a significant point, faithful to the Biblical passage and relevant to my life. 1 2 3 4 5

Five C’s good points well presented.

The preacher’s explanation were clear and compelling, not shallow and simplistic. 1 2 3 4 5

Explanations were clear and well thought out and presented in positive way.

“Yeah, But” : Struggling with the Implications from the Listener’s Perspective.

The preacher wouldn’t let me off easily, but helped me consider deeper implications. 1 2 3 4 5

Yes better than previous sermon. Pushed harder and that was good.

The preacher “read my mind,” taking seriously my honest objections and concerns. 1 2 3 4 5

Again the tough question to answer and didn’t address concerns and objectives directly overall. The over all theme was though provoking.

“Now What”: Motivating a Significant Life Response

The preacher helped me imagine how this message could change my world. 1 2 3 4 5

Application somewhat ambiguous in big picture. Could have been more directly practical.

The preacher made me want to respond obediently to whatever God was calling me. 1 2 3 4 5

Felt more challenged to respond this week.

Further Issues in Preaching.

The preacher looked me in the eye and appeared comfortable and confident throughout 1 2 3 4 5

Much better this week.

The preacher appeared to value me as a listener. I did not feel abused or manipulated. 1 2 3 4 5

Very much and not manipulated.

I would summarize the point of the message in the following sentence:

Other Comments?

Neat to see an 11 year old boy who sometimes struggles with attention, to be intently listening to the sermon during the Wile E. Coyote story of going beyond the point of no return. Nice use of the story from the movie Hook.

When making a final challenge – don't read it – look at the congregation. Perhaps more passion and emotional involvement during the closing comments.

Sermon 4 and Evaluation

Father's Day 2004

SERMON: FATHER'S WHO LEAD

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 6:1-4

INTRODUCTION: Happy Fathers Day! A day for phone calls, cards and special care for Dads. Form an article called 50 Reasons Why It's Good to be a Man, let me share just ten.

10. You know stuff about everything.
9. You can go to the bathroom without a support group.
8. If someone forgets to invite you to something he can still be your friend.
7. You can drop by to see a friend without bringing a little gift.
6. If another guy shows up at the same party in the same outfit, you might become lifelong buddies.
5. One wallet, one pair of good shoes, one color, all seasons.
4. There is always a game on somewhere.
3. Your pals can be trusted never to trap you with, "So...notice anything different?"
2. If something mechanical doesn't work, you can bash it with a hammer and by a new one.
1. You can do your nails with a jackknife.

There are some obvious advantages to being a man, aren't there? I want to start this morning with some encouraging news about dads. According to the National Center for fathering there has been "a fatherhood awakening," citing evidence that men are rediscovering what it means to be a father. Listen to a couple of surprising facts.

In the past 25 years, the number of dads present at their children's birth has risen from 27% to more than 90% percent today. More than 75% of men say they would trade rapid career advancement for more time with their families.

And yet, even with this good news, Time magazine, in an issue called, "The Hottest Jobs of the Future," lists fatherhood as one of the occupations that will disappear in this century. This is what it says, "Between in-vitro fertilization and cloning, dads could become dinosaurs."

Perhaps we may not become extinct like the dinosaurs there is still a growing ambivalence about the importance of fathers in our culture. Most fathers portrayed on television which shapes many peoples worldview are found on sitcoms where they are portrayed as dinosaurs or incompetent.

We need to come back to a biblical theology of fatherhood. God very clearly says that dads are to be difference-makers by leading and loving their wives and children. Fellow fathers, it's my prayer that through the study of God's Word we might experience a great awakening in both our person and in our parenting.

Our primary passage Ephesians 6:4 is a short one but it packs a wallop! *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children: instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

Some background is needed. In the first century, when this passage was written, families were presided over by fathers who could do whatever they pleased in their homes.

Rome had a law called 'patria potestas,' which meant "the father's power." Men who were Roman citizens were given absolute property rights over their families. By law, the children and the wife were regarded as the patriarch's personal chattel or property and could do with them what he wished. A displeased father could disown his children, sell them into slavery, or even kill them if he wished.

When a child was born, the baby was placed between the father's feet. If the father picked up the baby, the child stayed in the home. If he turned and walked away, the child was either left to die or sold at auction. Seneca, a contemporary of the apostle Paul, described Roman policy with regard to unwanted animals: "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge a knife into a sick cow. Children born weak or deformed we drown."

Friends, things are not much better today, are they? Millions of unwanted babies are aborted each year. Children have become a disposable commodity in our society, just as they were in ancient Rome.

The Bible calls Christian fathers to a different standard. Just as it was revolutionary for dads to lovingly lead their children in the first century, faithful fathers today who do not exasperate their kids are counter-cultural. Dads, we are called to provide a proper nurturing environment where our children can grow up to love and serve Christ. Our primary responsibilities by which our fathering will be judged is set forth in Ephesians 6:4.

I want you to notice the very first word of this verse: "Fathers." I think Paul addresses just dads here because he knows that we especially need to hear this. He doesn't say "parents" or "moms and dads." He uses the word "Fathers." Most of us dads are sloppy in our fathering, not giving much time or thought about what we are called to do. This verse brings us up short by calling us to some pretty high standards.

In essence, Paul is challenging us to see the word “fathers” as a verb not just as a noun. It’s biologically easy to become a father, but biblically challenging to actually “father” our children. The Bible very clearly challenges dads to become the point men in their homes because the ultimate responsibility for what a family becomes is the father’s. In this passage, we’re given 4 “Dad Duties.” One duty is something we should not do; the other three are what we are to do.

1. **AVOID EXASPERATION or ANGER.**

The first duty is negative we are told to “Don’t make your children angry by the way you treat them.

This is a caution or warning designed to put us on guard against stirring up anger in our children either deliberately or through careless provocations. It think Paul started with a negative command because he knows that fathers, who are fallen creatures, are prone to abuse their authority in the home.

The Greek word translated “exasperate” means “to rouse to anger” or “to enrage.” The present tense of the verb indicates that we are to stop doing something that is common and continuous. This warning is calling us dads to avoid anything that will eventually break the spirit of our children.

Paul puts it this way in Colossians 3:21 *“Fathers, don’t aggravate your children. If you do, they will become discouraged and quit trying.”*

While there are times when children become angry because of their own fallen sinful nature, their own selfishness or immaturity, there are times when dads are guilty of aggravating their kids. We can do that by deliberately goading them, by callously neglecting them or by any number of other intentional or careless means that exasperate them. When that happens, it is we dads who are sinning and provoking our children to sin as well.

Remember that our children are commanded by God to honor us. When we provoke them to anger, we are causing them to sin against the Fifth Commandment. In such cases we are guilty before God of disobeying Ephesians 6:4 and also doubly guilty for causing our children to stumble.

Here are some common ways fathers can exasperate their children:

1. Overprotection

You can anger your kids by fencing them in too much. This is most difficult if you are a father with daughters. But we have to be careful so that our daughters don’t grow up thinking we don’t trust them.

Have you ever heard of the “Ten Simple Rules for Dating My Daughter.” Here’s rule #1: If you pull into my driveway and honk, you’d better be delivering a package, because you’re sure not picking anything up. And rule #5 It is usually understood that in order for us to get to know each other, we should talk about sports, politics, and other issues of the day. Please do not do this. The only information I require from you is an indication of when you expect to have my daughter safely home, and the only word I need from you on this subject is “early.”

Laban, and Old Testament dad, was an overprotective and domineering parent. He dealt dishonestly with Jacob in order to get him to marry Leah, his eldest daughter, even though Jacob loved Rachel, the younger one. In exchange for a promise to work for Laban for 7 years, Jacob was allowed to marry Rachel as well. His controlling parenting cost his own daughters a healthy marriage.

Ironically, despite Laban’s overprotective interfering, the daughter’s assessment was that their father did not really care for them. Genesis 31:15 records “*He has reduced our rights to those of foreign women. He sold us, and what he received for us has disappeared.*” What their dad had thought of as an expression of parental protection came across as evidence that he did not really love them.

2. Overindulgence.

The flip side of overprotection is overindulgence. Excessively permissive parents are as likely to stir their children’s anger as much as those who stifle them. Studies prove that children given too much freedom begin to feel insecure and unloved. Because our society has fostered increasingly permissive attitudes toward children, we are now reaping the harvest of a whole generation of angry young people.

3. Favoritism

A third way to exasperate children is by showing favoritism. Isaac favored Esau over Jacob, and Rebecca preferred Jacob over Esau. That family experienced terrible agony and two brothers became bitter rivals. If you want to destroy your children, just make him feel inferior to everyone else in the family.

4. Unrealistic Goals.

Dads, we can provoke your children to wrath by constantly pushing achievement. 1 Thessalonians 2:11 shows us Paul’s fatherly concern for

the church: *“And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy.”*

5. Discouragement.

As Colossians 3:21 challenges us, we are not to provoke our children to anger or they will become discouraged. Dad, let's stop the criticism and sarcasm in the home. Let's look for ways to celebrate and applaud. Let's give our approval spontaneously so our kids don't have to earn it or look for it in the arms of a boyfriend or girlfriend. Let's catch our children doing things right instead of lashing out at them for what they do wrong.

Here's a rule of thumb: For every time you have to point out something that your children do wrong, try to equalize it with a word of encouragement.

6. Neglect.

Another way to exasperate your children is by neglecting them. When we fail to show affection and act indifferently toward our children, we can cause them to burn with anger. We can neglect our children by never being home; or we can do it by being home but not involved in their lives. Fathers, "You can't expect your children to follow in your footsteps if you feel they are always under your feet."

7. Excessive discipline.

Too much punishment is another sure way to provoke a child to anger. Dads, don't ride your children constantly. The father who throws his weight around whether physically or verbally can be devastating to a child's spirit. Hebrews 12 says that God always disciplines us in love and so should we.

That's the negative side of our dad duty: avoid exasperation. Now, let's look at the training and instruction of the Lord.

2. PROVIDE NUTURE.

The word "instead" shows a contrast between what we should not do and what we are to do. Here's the first thing we are called to do: "provide nurture." The NIV and the NLT translates this verb "bring them up."

We are to bring our children up because they will not get there by themselves. Dads, we are to take an active role in shaping the character of our children. Proverbs 29:15 says, *“A child left to himself brings shame to his*

mother.” John MacArthur puts it this way: “What ruins most children is not what their parents do to them, but what they do not do for them.”

What strikes me here is that as a dad I am called to not just raise my children. I’m called to raise adults. I’m charged with providing a nurturing environment so that they grow up to become young men and women of God. The phrase, “bring them up” also carries with it the idea of “tutoring” and “instructing.”

According to a 50 year study of Christian and non-Christian families, most young adults who follow Christ either come from non-Christian homes or from homes where they grew up in love with Jesus because mom and dad were in love with Jesus. Their parent’s passion for Christ permeated their lives and passed through their pores to their children. Sadly, very few believers come from homes where there was a kind of indifferent, apathetic commitment to Christ. It is sobering to suggest that the chances are better for children growing up in a non-Christian home to become a sold-out believer than from a child growing up in a spiritually lukewarm environment.

Dads, how are you doing on this one? Are you modeling authentic faith? Are you providing a nurturing atmosphere in your home in which your children can grow up to love and serve Christ? Are you looking for ways to teach and tutor your children or are you leaving this for mom to handle?

Someone has said, “One way to correct your children is to correct the example you’re setting for them.”

3. PROVIDE DISCIPLINE.

The next thing Paul challenges us to do is to provide discipline for our children. This word is translated “admonition” in some of your Bibles and carries with it the idea of a rebuke or a warning. Literally, it means to “place before the mind.”

Proverbs 13:24 NLT says, “If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves you don’t love them; if you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them.”

You may hesitate to discipline because you think that you’re being unkind to your children. Actually, when you don’t discipline, you’re being more than unkind you’re not loving them. If we love our children, then we must admonish, rebuke, and discipline them.

Listen carefully. I’m not advocating that you beat your children. What I am saying is this: children need to be disciplined by their dads. Our children not only

need correction, they want it. If we don't give it to them, we're failing them and may cause them to fall away from the faith.

Hebrews 12:10 -11 speaks of God's loving discipline in our lives by showing how beneficial it really is: *"For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening – it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way."*

It's important to understand the difference between discipline and punishment. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty and focuses on the past. The purpose of discipline is to promote growth by looking to the future. Dads, our children are looking for us to train them and love them by disciplining them.

4. PROVIDE INSTRUCTION.

And so dads, we are to avoid making your children angry if at all possible and we're to provide nurture and discipline. There's one last thing that we're called to do in this verse: we're to provide instruction. Notice that this instruction is to be "in the Lord."

"Lord" is an extremely exalted title as Paul uses it in the New Testament. To say that Jesus is Lord means that He is the rightful kind of the universe, He is ruler over the entire world, He is commander of all the armies of heaven, He is triumphant over sin and death and pain and Satan and hell, and He will one day establish His kingdom in righteousness.

Dads, we are to bring up our children to hope in the triumph of God. There are at least three ways that we can do this:

- Bring them up to find their place in the triumphant cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Bring them up to see everything in relation to the victory of God.
- Do whatever it takes to make all of life God- saturated and centered for your children.

Our goal is not merely to get our children to outwardly conform to a list of rules. Our mandate is to develop children who seek to glorify God with their lives. It is not enough to teach them to do good things; our job is to teach our children how to develop a lifestyle of kingdom servanthood.

Let's be honest about something. We have a problem, don't we? My trouble, more often than not, is that I'm not engaged as a dad. I'm not always fully present. My heart is not always on the job.

Dads, before you and I leave this service feeling discouraged by our own failures and inconsistency, let me remind you of three things:

1. There are no perfect fathers, except our Heavenly Father.
2. We can all be better dads if we will work at it.
3. We do not father alone. That's why we need to pray daily for our kids.

CONCLUSION: Chuck Swindoll, in his book, "The Strong Family" says, "C'mon dads...Let's start saying no to more and more of the things that pull us farther and farther away from the ones who need us the most....You're not perfect? So, what else is new? You don't know exactly how to pull it off? Welcome to the club...your family doesn't expect profound perfection, command performances, or a superhuman plan. They just want you warts and all...Let's get started."

Evaluation Form

Preacher: Leo Gallant

Date: June 20, 2004 Bible Text: Ephesians 6:1-4.

Please evaluate the presentation based on the following issues and concerns (1=poor 5=excellent). Feel free to add any appropriate comments.

“So What”: Creating an Experience of the Text: Poor – Exc.

The preacher quickly aroused my interest. I was emotionally engaged in the sermon. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Good this week! Personal emotion expressed well.

The preacher helped me identify with the people and issues of the original Bible story. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Concepts expressed in Ephesians transferred well to congregation through contemporary examples, and Paul's examples of Fatherhood in Ephesians – good first century information on childhood/fatherhood.

“What’s What” : Offering an Explanation of the Text:

The preacher had significant point, faithful to the Biblical passage and relevant to my life. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Good – stuck to father’s responsibility as main point. Very good application – practical.

The preacher's explanation were clear and compelling, not shallow and simplistic. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Thoughts presented were well thought out, researched and presented clearly – ie how fathers are to act and react in their family and particularly to children. Good humor added.

“Yeah, But” : Struggling with the Implications from the Listener’s Perspective.

Comments: Personal identification with audience was very good this week.

The preacher wouldn’t let me off easily, but helped me consider deeper implications. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: This was much better this week also – personal emotion drew me in and spoke to me.

The preacher “read my mind,” taking seriously may honest objections and concerns. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Still have hard time with this question – however as a father Leo’s thoughts and experiences common to many dads.

“Now What”: Motivating a Significant Life Response

The preacher helped me imagine how this message could change my world. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Some very good examples of how to deal with children by encouragement, love and affection. Etc.

The preacher made me want to respond obediently to whatever God was calling me. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Used scripture and personal examples to help. We are to listen to God through His word. Leo presented good practical examples.

Further Issues in Preaching.

The preacher looked me in the eye and appeared comfortable and confident throughout 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: This subject was near and dear to Leo and he was comfortable, personal experience made him confident. He knows personally about fatherhood and many experiences helped his presentation, well done.

The preacher appeared to value me as a listener. I did not feel abused or manipulated. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: Yes – valued me as a listener – felt security in his sermon.

I would summarize the point of the message in the following sentence:

Comments: Father's provide a nurturing environment in homes for children to grow in Christ.

Other Comments?

Comments: Leo gave good examples, explained Ephesian passage well and was vulnerable which endears speaker to audience.

Sermon 4

Date: June 27, 2004

SERMON: LIVING WATER

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 7:37-39

INTRODUCTION: What does Jesus do when the whole world is opposition to his ministry? He does not pour out his wrath, He doesn't write off the world. No, He offers all who will listen, "**living water.**"

In the seventh chapter Jesus is under opposition from His friends, family and the religious community. John tells us that from the fifth chapter on Jesus is in His last year of earthly ministry and that He is heading towards the cross. However, Jesus is still in charge of the journey and we are reminded of this when Jesus says, "My time has not yet come." Jesus will not be pushed by his half-brothers or by His followers who are eager for the coming of the Kingdom of God. And He will not be hunted down by the Jewish religious leaders who want to take His life. No Jesus' ministry still has a year to go and there is much to say and much to do before He goes to the cross on Calvary.

The festival that Jesus attended a long with every other Jewish male was the Festival of Booths which reminded the nation how God protected, and provided for their deliverance from 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

Jesus slipped into Jerusalem quietly during the festival. He preached openly in the Temple that He was the Messiah which prompted the Jewish leadership to plot his death. In the face of danger and at the climax of the festival Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds. "If you are thirsty, come to Me!"

His words reminds me of Ezekiel 37:1-9 (read the passage)

Jesus now stood at the climax of the festival and spoke to a Valley of Dry Bones of His day, and today He speaks to us who may be languishing in our own valley of dryness.

What is the dryness of our day? I observe that in the church and in the lives of so many people a real dryness that manifests itself in lack of vision, apathy, indifference and to use a biblical term "lukewarmness."

Speaking to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:15 Jesus says, "*I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth!*"

You say, "I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing! And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

Verse 19 "I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference."

In our text Jesus shouts out to the crowds and to us concerning our need, faith, and power.

1. First, Jesus gives a **"Profession of Need."** –
"If you are thirsty", "Come to me. "

Most people do not realize they have a need for the forgiveness of sin. In our post modern world sin has been galvanized, and justified to the point that people no longer take responsibility for their actions. People are not shocked concerning sin, especially sexual sin, but publish it openly. "My Life" written by former president Bill Clinton probably sold out in a couple of days this week. And sales will probably make him a very richer man. People are not buying it to understand his childhood, his politics, or to understand the counseling he has undergone, people will buy it for what he says about his relationship with a young female intern. Listening to an interview I got the impression that he has received forgiveness from those whom he hurt and he indicated that he received forgiveness from God. Asked why he did the things he did, he said, "Because I could."

President Clinton has a thirst for power but he went to the wrong well.

Most people do not realize they are thirsty. They live their life with a fatalistic philosophy. Others come to the conclusion that there must be more to life than what they are experiencing. So many people who are dissatisfied with life play the "If" game. "If" I just had a bigger home I would be satisfied. "If" I just had a better car I would be happier. "If" I wear the best designer cloths I would be popular. "If" I had more money I could buy my way to a fuller life.

A philosopher of the post modern Mick Jager sings, "I can't get no satisfaction, I've tired and I've tried and I've tried."

No amount of trying on our part will ever quench the thirst of the soul. Only Jesus says to us, "If you are thirsty, come to me!"

Remember what Jesus said to the Woman at the Well who came daily for water. *"People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life." John 4:13 NLT.*

The very last promise in the Bible from the lips of Jesus which says, "Yes, I am coming." Just before this promise is another which reads, "*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let each one who hears them say, "Come." Let the thirsty ones come – any one who wants to. Let them come and drink the water of life without charge.*"

The greatest need for everyone is to experience salvation through Jesus. And there is no charge; it is free for the receiving. Jesus simply says, "If you are thirsty, Come!"

2. Secondly, Jesus gives a "**Proclamation of Faith.**

"If you believe, come and drink.

It is not enough to profess that you have a need, we must also possess faith in Jesus in order to come and drink.

Having our deepest needs met without having faith in Jesus is like driving a car without wheels. You can sit in the car, turn on the key, hear the engine, play with the radio, signal lights. You can even put it in gear. But without rubber on the road you are not going to get very far. Without faith in Jesus life is has no purpose or meaning.

Notice that faith is personal. My faith will not save you and your faith will not save me. Faith must flow in the life of the believer in order to live fully for Christ.

There are three things a body of water needs in order to life and produce life in abundance.

There must be **in-flow**. Into a body must flow water that carries freshness and life. Water that has no inflow loses its oxygen, and without it everything dies.

Flowing into the life of the believer must be the word of God and prayer. Only when we are bathed in God's Word do we have power in prayer. For it is through the Word of God we understand the will of God.

We must also have "**out-flow**" in order to experience life. I believe that the out flow from the Christian is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal. 5:22) These are the Fruit of the Spirit that is resident in the heart of everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ.

When there is the **inflow** of God's Word accompanied by Prayer there will be an **out flow** of the fruit of the spirit with the result of an **over-flow** of abundance in our lives.

As a teenage I was always very interested in how the water rose in the Tobique River that flowed through our small northern New Brunswick village. I knew if the water was high and flooded the islands in the river that there would be an abundance of the world's best fiddleheads. The year I graduated from High School the water was particularly high and that year I picked enough fiddleheads to pay for my graduation pictures, suit and ring. There was an overflow of abundance that spring.

When God's Word is alive in our daily living, when the outflow of our lives is the Fruit of the Spirit there is an abundant life in and through the Holy Spirit.

3. Jesus gives "**Power for Living.**" – "*Living water will flow out.*"

Jesus reminds us in this text that he gives "Power for living" – "Living water will flow out from within."

What flows out from within is the Holy Spirit.

There is much confusion for many believers as to the role that the Holy Spirit plays in our abundant living.

We must always remember that the Holy Spirit is a person. He is the third person of the Trinity, co-eternal, co-equal with the Father and the Son. As a person He is in relationship with us and scripture tells us that we can "grieve" the Holy Spirit, as we live disobedient rather than abundant lives.

What does the Holy Spirit do?

- The work of the Holy Spirit is to **convict unbelievers concerning sin**. In John 16:8-11 we read: *And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is unbelief in me.*
- **He controls our lives as we surrender to His will.** Romans 8:9 *"But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you."*
- **He gives new life.** John 3:3-7 *"Jesus replied, 'I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God. Verse 5 'The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Human can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven.'*
- **He enlightens or teaches.** John 16:13 *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."* Romans 8:16 *"For his Holy Spirit speaks*

to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are his children, we will share his treasures – for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too.”

- **He helps in prayer.** Romans 8:26-27 *“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don’t even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.”*
- **He comforts.** John 14:26 *“But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative – and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you.”*
- **He Seals.** Ephesians 1:13-14 *“And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own, by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.”*
- **He empowers the believer’s life.** Phil. 1:6 *“And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back”*

Acts 1:8 “But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere – “

- **He Imparts Gifts.** Romans 12:6-8 *“God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.*
- **He produces fruit .** Galatians 5:22-23.
- **He seeks to fill the Believer.** Ephesians 5:18 *“Don’t get drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.”*

CONCLUSION: As a teenager I loved the river. I loved the beauty and the bounty of the river. I also loved its currents to feel the blow of the river as it passed over the body when I was completely surrendered to it. Only when we are surrendered to the Holy Spirit will we experience the benefits and blessings of the living water that flows out from within. There is a river that flows from deep within;

There is a fountain that frees the soul from sin.

Come to the water, there is a vast supply.

There is a river that never shall run dry.

Evaluation Form

Preacher: Rev. Leo Gallant

Date: June 27/04 Bible Text: John 7:37-39

Please evaluate the presentation based on the following issues and concerns (1=poor 5=excellent). Feel free to add any appropriate comments.

“So What”: Creating an Experience of the Text: Poor – Exc.

The preacher quickly aroused my interest. I was emotionally engaged in the sermon. 1 2 3 4 5

Not quickly but once into the sermon became more engaging, not as deeply emotionally involved as previous week.

The preacher helped me identify with the people and issues of the original Bible story. 1 2 3 4 5

Began to but left before I could really get into the issues of original scriptural context.

“What’s What” : Offering an Explanation of the Text:

The preacher had significant point, faithful to the Biblical passage and relevant to my life. 1 2 3 4 5

Yes – good crossover application and examples.

The preacher’s explanation were clear and compelling, not shallow and simplistic. 1 2 3 4 5

Explanations were clear, not overly compelling but well explained, not shallow or trite.

“Yeah, But” : Struggling with the Implications from the Listener’s Perspective.

The preacher wouldn’t let me off easily, but helped me consider deeper implications. 1 2 3 4 5

Didn’t personalize and seek response; never considered deeper application.

The preacher “read my mind,” taking seriously my honest objections and concerns. 1 2 3 4 5

Not a mind reader – generally did attempt to identify with local examples of scriptural principles.

“Now What”: Motivating a Significant Life Response

The preacher helped me imagine how this message could change my world. 1 2 3 4 5

Explanation of abundant life lacked passion to affect me to change.

The preacher made me want to respond obediently to whatever God was calling me. 1 2 3 4 5

Provided good information, scripturally and practical explanations were very good didn't feel pushed to respond – again god preaching but passion of conviction didn't press me to change.

Further Issues in Preaching.

The preacher looked me in the eye and appeared comfortable and confident throughout 1 2 3 4 5

He was comfortable – got out from behind the pulpit – good presentation.

The preacher appeared to value me as a listener. I did not feel abused or manipulated. 1 2 3 4 5

I would summarize the point of the message in the following sentence:

Other Comments?

Overall presented topic well – good preaching – not as personal or passionate as could be – voice inflection, body language, scriptural knowledge and application were very good.

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