

Lay Preaching Workshop

“A sermon is an event, complete in itself”¹

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¹ Bishop Garry Weatherill, “Preaching the Word: A preacher reflects on practice” from *Australian Journal of Liturgy*, Vol 14, No. 3, 2015 (Australian Academy of Liturgy: Altona).

What is a sermon?

Brainstorm

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“The work of preaching is the highest and greatest and most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.”

Martin Lloyd-Jones

Some useful terms

<i>Exegesis</i>	To guide out → to interpret with reference to text, context, genre, theology
<i>Eisegesis</i>	To guide into → to introduce your own presuppositions, agenda or bias without being troubled by the wisdom, learning, or experience of others
<i>Education</i>	To lead out → to take a principle and draw the meaning out of it in such a way that people gather new understandings
<i>Inspire</i>	To breathe into → true inspiration reveals the breath of God

<i>Challenge</i>	To accuse → to test the listener's commitment/faithfulness/expression of Christianity in life
<i>Relevant</i>	To raise up → make a connection between the text and the world you think your audience lives in and the life of the worshipping community

Why preach?

Matthew 5:1 (Who?)

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:"

²Acts 10:42 (Who is Lord of All?)

⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.

² *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1989.

Mark 16:15 (Great Commission and Good News)

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news^d to the whole creation.”

Titus 1:9 (Faith, trust, encouragement, knowledge, apology)

⁹ He must have a strong and steadfast belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with right teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.

Acts 10:36 (Preaching Peace)

³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.

^d Or *gospel*

Preparation Strategy

Broadly speaking, preachers tend toward one of two well-established traditions: percolate or panic.

Percolate (to strain through, to filter gradually through a porous substance)

Thinking, praying, speaking with others, reading books, reading the newspaper ...

Panic (a state of widespread alarm provoking hasty action)

Reacting

Ultimately you need to determine which strategy works best for you.

Strategies to access the Text

Read all about it

Read the text – read the commentaries – read the paper – read the parish magazine – read the prayers ...

Speak for your servant is listening

Bring the text before God and ask God to reveal what it is the congregation needs to hear.

Lectio Divina (Divine Reading)

1. Read
2. Meditate
3. Pray
4. Contemplate

You can do this on your own, but it can be even more helpful to pray with at least one other.

- Begin by praying together,
Gracious God,
who caused Holy Scripture to be written for our learning:
Grant us so to hear, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace the hope of abundant life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.
- Read the selected passage aloud and listen for a word or phrase that strikes you as significant. At this stage it doesn't matter why it's significant, just underline it. Now be silent and pray.
- Share (or write) the word or phrase that seemed significant with one another.
- Read the selected passage aloud again. If possible use another version of the Bible. Now go beyond the text and ask yourself: "Where does this passage touch my life today?" Silent reflection.
- Share (or write) your response to the question. If someone is telling you their reflection your job is just to listen.
- Read the passage aloud for the third time, and ask yourself:
What do I believe God wants me to do or be?
Is God inviting me to change in any way?
Silent reflection on questions and Scripture.
- Share (or write) your reflections. You may offer feedback and discussion.
- Pray for yourself/the person/people you have meditated with and then conclude together with these words:
God, you call us to serve you with all the strength we have:
you are faithful to those you call;
may Jesus' resurrection raise us if we stumble,
the Christlight beckon us if we lose our way,
and we shall have strength once more
to walk with you to the cross.
Amen.

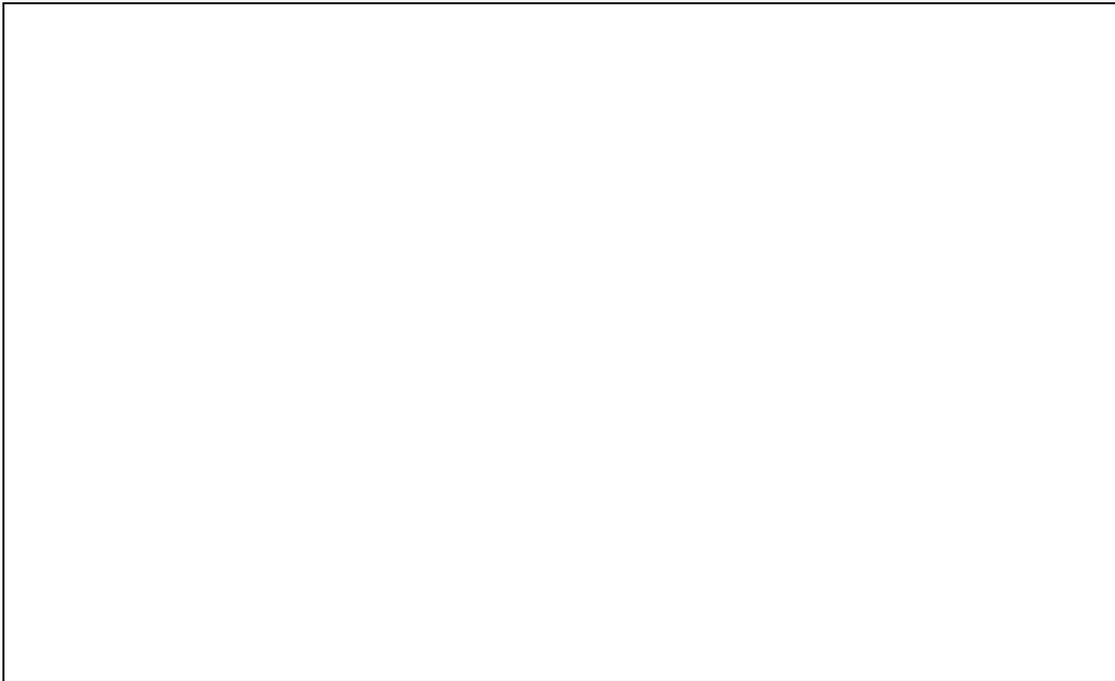
Talk it out

For some of us the only way things make sense are for us to hear them aloud. Many people 'hear' their sermon for the first time when they say it on a Sunday morning. For some this is when they make the most internal progress with the text itself and what God is trying to say. If that describes you, then try having conversations earlier in the week to allow you to test what you are saying and to get the input of others.

Think in 3-d

No doubt you have heard the tales of people who have returned from the Holy Land and walked in the footsteps of Jesus. They describe it is transformational. While most of us cannot do that we can try something similar.

- Go online: the internet is full of reconstructions of ancient sites that have been virtually rebuilt. Some sites have a 3d walkthrough available – you can virtually visit Ephesus, or the Temple, or the Mount of Olives, etc...
- Open up the Map book: what did it really mean for the disciples to walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back? How far? What kind of road? What kind of risks?
- Reconstruct the geography of the text: consider Matthew 14.22-33



Structure

There is no one structure that you must follow and you may find it useful to experiment. However, if you are feeling lost then consider the following:

Prayer	Commence with a short prayer that outlines the main theme (this is normally the last thing I write)
Opening story	Something of your own that connects with you, your audience, and the text
Interpretation & Education	Open the Scripture up and help people access it
Application	Demonstrate a connection between the Scripture and your context
Challenge	Invite congregation to do something new, be more aware of something, make a change ...
Prayer	Conclude in a prayer

In the Appendix at the end of this booklet you will find another structure and strategy developed by Paul Scott Wilson called *The Four Pages of Sermon*. It has been summarized but more can be found

here <https://www.ryanepaulson.com/blog/2018/8/12/the-four-pages-of-a-sermon-summary>. If you wish to purchase/read the book then you can find the details in the References section below.

How long should you preach?

“If you ask me how you may shorten your sermons, I should say, study them better ... We are generally longest when we have least to say.”

Charles Spurgeon

Context, tradition, audience, service ...

Notes and Questions

Resources

Websites

<http://textweek.com/> (Scripture index, Movie Index, Art Index, Podcasts ...)

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/> (Notes and explanations about each reading in the lectionary)

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Suggestions made by others

Appendix: The Four Pages of a Sermon

The following is a summary of Paul Scott Wilson's work compiled by Ryan Paulson and available at

<https://www.ryanepaulson.com/blog/2018/8/12/the-four-pages-of-a-sermon-summary>

Page One | Trouble In The Text

- Examines sinfulness and its consequences, together with human responsibility for corrective action in light of God's will.
- Something is wrong in God's world because then, as now, sin is present.
- What requires grace in this passage?
- Develop the trouble deeply and theologically.
- Trouble at the simplest level is the burden on humans to change.
- "The gospel is bad news before it is good news." Frederick Buechner
- The right question for people to wrestle with is: "What is God doing and how am I empowered to live as I was created to live."

Page Two | Trouble In The World

- Page two interprets the same trouble as page one, but in our world today.
- Our assumption is that while much has changed in the last 3,000 years, some things remain the same.
- Three-part understanding of trouble:
 - **Transcendent trouble** – God is sovereign, sits on the throne of judgment, humanity is down below, guilty s charged, in need of corrective action, but also in need of forgiveness. Sin is individual before God and must be dealt with by God. One must think through whether they present these as indicatives or imperatives. If they're always imperatives, the preach can tend to feel heavy-handed or bullish. The trouble here is vertical – between the person and God.
 - **Immanent trouble** – This is an exploration of the world horizontally seeing the effects of the fall. Humanity fails to live the way God designed us to live and continues to seek salvation in the wrong things. Sin permeates society; the consequences of social behaviour are evident. Some examples could be: anxiety, meaninglessness, unemployment, racism, global warming, etc.
 - **Human trouble** – this flows from the first two, but is concerned primarily with the human responsibility to act.

TRANSCENDENT TROUBLE Vertical judgment	IMMANENT Horizontal judgment	HUMAN TROUBLE Vertical and horizontal judgment
Addresses the guilty conscience	Awakens consciousness of others	Awakens a sense of duty
Individual sin	Social sin	Individual and social sin
Law as hammer	Law as mirror	Law is all
Broken commandments	Broken society	Broken commandments and society
Theocentric	Christocentric	Anthropocentric
God as Creator/Sovereign	God as Suffering Servant/Savior	God as remote/forsaken/irrelevant
Doctrine of creation/fall	Doctrine of incarnation/crucifixion	Doctrine of human ability
Preacher seems above the Word	Preacher stands under the Word	Preacher is an agent of the law
Individuals must repent	Society must change	Human ability to change is the only hope
Individuals need God's forgiveness	Society needs God's intervention	Humanity needs to do better

- The goal is to begin to establish the tension between trouble and grace – the same tension that exists in faith.
- General rule: be empathetic rather than condemning.

Page Three | God's Action In The Bible

- We return to the Bible and we return to God.
- We must centre on God... but we also must convey that there is hope for us because God is at work restoring and renewing.
- Most preaching has a deficit of God's action - grace.
- There is a theological movement from brokenness to grace.
- Trouble puts the burden on the people to act; grace puts the burden on God in Christ who has already acted decisively on our behalf.
- A sermon should build on grace, explore it, amplify it, demonstrate how God continues to act in our lives in similar ways.

- **Seven common struggles for preachers in preaching grace:**
 - They shift too quickly back to human responsibility
 - They confuse imperatives with grace
 - They confuse non-action verbs with grace
 - They stop short of the fullest expression of grace
 - They fail to establish the tension between trouble and grace
 - They delay the introduction of grace to the conclusion viewing it as the punchline of a story
 - They mistake trouble and grace for problem and solution – the gospel is not a bandage

Page Four | God's Action In The World

- It can be hard to point definitely to God's action, but God revealed in the Scripture is the same God now and for all time.
- This section must connect back to the trouble in our day on page two – how is God at work in that trouble? How is he answering? How is he calling us to answer?
- **Four functions of page four:**
 - Apply God's grace from the Bible times to now.
 - Provide sustained focus on God's action in the world. Listeners encounter the rise Christ in the proclamation and reception of the Word and part of that proclamation in ideas, images, and stories that we tell.
 - Provides a balance to page two and the trouble there.
 - Puts the world into appropriate juxtaposition or tension with grace. It's not happily ever after, but rather, the strong conviction that Jesus and resurrection are at work in real ways.
- Page four will often be where the mission falls – however, it's presented not as a task, but as a privileged, and honour, and opportunity.

Jesus is portrayed as our saviour – the one who equips and empowers, and whose endeavours we join.

