

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CAMPUS MINISTER WHO PREACHES**

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Preaching is important for many campus ministers. Although not critical to their ministries, it is considered a significant aspect nonetheless. There are several reasons for this perception. One is that they sense that preaching the gospel is their basic call from God. It is a task which they have understood to be the Lord's assignment for them in this world. Consequently, even though God has guided such people into a ministry to students in a campus setting, where preaching isn't generally a part of the job description, they feel a Jeremiah-like mandate to declare the word that is burning as fire in their bones. Another reason preaching is significant for some campus ministers is that they find it to be fulfilling. It becomes for them an avocation with its own rewards, a delightful change of pace from the activities related to daily campus ministry. Yet another reason preaching has priority for some ministers to students is that it enhances the minister's relationship with the churches. The campus minister who is given the opportunity to preach in the supporting churches in the same locale as the campus more readily becomes known and appreciated by the people in the churches. Certainly not all campus ministers share the above attitudes about preaching as a part of their ministries, but for those who do I have some suggestions that I hope will be of help in their effort to proclaim effectively God's Good News.

In order to preach well in the churches the campus minister must stay in touch with the needs of the total spectrum of people. Because his<sup>1</sup> work limits his day-by-day contact with people other than students, the campus

## 6 *Suggestions for the Campus Minister Who Preaches*

minister must intentionally work at ways to remain aware of the needs of senior adults, adolescents and others in the churches. As he prepares sermons for worship in churches, he must address God's word to the unemployed husband and father as well as the disadvantaged student. He is to keep as firmly in mind the need for affirmation in the disabled breadwinner as the need of an unpopular student for encouragement. Fred Craddock suggests a process that will help with this particular problem.<sup>2</sup> He advises the preacher periodically to take a sheet of paper, write a category at the top of the page such as "a mother whose last child has recently moved out," "a sixteen year old boy in a new school," "a husband and father who was recently told about an extended layoff from work;" then ask the question of each category, "What would it feel like to be that person?" Jot down anything that comes to mind in response to the question. Another activity that will assist the campus minister in staying aware of the variety of people's concerns is to become a volunteer worker in the church with some group other than students. Do hospital visitation. Offer to lead an older children's group in Church Training. In general take deliberate steps to broaden your perspective about people's needs through selected reading, listening, service, and observation of life.

Consider next that one's preaching can be improved by doing all one can to see that the Biblical text for the sermon dictates both the intention and the substance of the sermon. In order for a sermon to manifest Biblical authority, the preacher must not force his good ideas, opinions and doctrines on the text or use the text in support of what he wants to say, but rather discover the real message of the text and build a sermon that makes that message clear and applicable to people today.

The best way to begin the process that is more likely to assure Biblical authority for the sermon is to approach the text as free as possible from all previous interpretations.<sup>3</sup>

This doesn't mean that the interpreter must forget all the explanations he has previously heard or read about the text, but only that he needs to temporarily place those aside in order to improve the likelihood that the text will say something fresh and current to him and to the listeners to his sermon on the text. Also, at this early stage of interpretation, the preacher should admit his bias about the text. This means that he will consciously acknowledge that which he wants the text to say so that he can do his best not to force that interpretation on the text. The preacher will do well to exercise caution about the tendency to grab hold of the text saying "Tell me what I want to hear or I'll not let you go!" His attitude toward the text will be ideally, "Tell me what I and my listeners need to hear or I'll not let you go!"

The interpreter is now ready to read the text carefully. As he reads it several times in two or three different translations, he should be prepared to jot down any and all of the following: (1) Insights about possible meanings and applications of those meanings to his life and the lives of his hearers; (2) Illustrations that immediately come to mind; (3) Questions about anything in the text that he doesn't understand or finds curious.<sup>4</sup> This exercise allows the text to interpret the preacher. It also provides the interpreter with a sense of the text taking the initiative for the development of the sermon. Furthermore, the preacher's feeling of ownership of the sermon will begin to arise.

The next step in the hermeneutical process is the traditional matter of exegesis. The usual study aids are brought out at this point. As the interpreter delves into concerns about historical, theological, and literary exegesis of the text, most of the questions he asked in the previous procedure will be answered. In fact, those questions will serve very well as a guide for the exegetical process. In addition the commentaries and other scholarly aids will

## 8 *Suggestions for the Campus Minister Who Preaches*

either affirm or question the insights that surfaced in the previous step. The primary concern is to discover the original meaning of the text. This discovery is essential in order for the sermon from the text to have Biblical authority.

The last concern in the effort to understand the text is to discover its meaning for the audience to which the sermon will be addressed. The results of the previous stages in the exercise should all blend together during this time to provide the preacher with an effective transition from the text to the sermon. Any number of guidelines for accurate application of the text for life today may be offered but perhaps the following will prove to be most helpful:

1. Find the corresponding factors between the original situation and the situation today. This is based upon a comparison of the results of historical exegesis with that which the preacher knows about the current milieu of religious, socio-political, economic, and spiritual factors at work in the lives of these to whom the sermon will be directed.
2. Look for the people with whom to identify both the preacher and his listeners in the text. Be realistic rather than idealistic in this assessment.
3. Seek to find familiar words that most precisely communicate the intended meaning of the Biblical words.
4. Give consideration to all possible meanings of the text for life today. This is a particularly significant step to take with texts that lend themselves to debate.
5. When possible and feasible, attempt to accomplish a corresponding purpose in the lives of the

listeners to the one apparently in the mind of the original author for his readers or hearers.

The next suggestion is that any preacher develop to the ultimate his capacity to tell good stories. Narrative theology recently has made a significant contribution to homiletics. Much has been written about the power of blending human stories with the story of redemption in preaching. Some preachers who considered their preaching a major weakness have discovered that the cultivation of the use of stories in their sermons has noticeably upgraded their preaching. Jesus was the master storyteller and is the major model for preaching. Some of the reasons why storytelling enhances preaching are: (1) Human beings by nature love a good story. This is one characteristic of childhood we never lose; (2) Stories are concrete rather than abstract, making the truths they convey easier to comprehend and remember; (3) Stories are excellent for the imparting of emotions as well as thoughts. The emotional impact of the truth is a weightier force in the changing of behavior through communication than is the concept itself. One can let his imagination run free in the development of a story. The more vividly he describes a scene, the more poignantly he explains an emotion, the greater impact his story will make.

Stories can be used in several ways in sermons. A story may be the entire sermon. A story or narrative sermon can be told from a variety of perspectives. However, only one perspective should be employed in each sermon. A story or narrative sermon may be told from the perspective of a person who is involved in the story. For example, one may assume the role of Andrew and tell about bringing Simon Peter to Jesus. A variation on this approach is to tell the story as an insignificant or even fictitious character in the story who is observing what the major characters are doing and reporting on those activities. Thus there can be a hypothetical friend of the brothers who observes and describes the process of Andrew bringing Peter to Christ.

## 10 *Suggestions for the Campus Minister Who Preaches*

Either way the storyteller would use the first person pronoun. Another perspective from which a preacher can formulate a narrative sermon is that of a detached observer. He is not a participant in the story but one who observes the event and tells what he sees and hears concerning the characters in the story. One should use the third person pronoun with this approach.<sup>5</sup>

A good storyteller will give attention to the development of an interesting plot. Stories will usually begin with a description of some kind of tension or disruption which requires resolution. The next stage will be the building of suspense concerning the resolution of the problem. Then will come an obvious climax or point of reversal in the story. This is the turning point in the plot. The story will then draw to a close with a resolution or dénouement and conclude with the making of applications and drawing of lessons based upon the story.<sup>6</sup> The following sequence of a first person participant narration about Peter's denial of Christ will illustrate the above movements:<sup>7</sup>

1. Simon Peter's astonishment at Christ's assertion that the shepherd will be taken and the sheep will scatter (disruption).
2. Christ talks of his betrayal and death (building of suspense).
3. Christ is betrayed and taken to trial (continuation of suspense).
4. Peter's denial (reversal, climax, turning point).
5. Peter's repentance and forgiveness (resolution, dénouement).
6. Peter reflects on why he denied Christ (application, lessons).

Stories also can be used for illustrations in both inductively and deductively organized sermons. In an inductive sermon, several stories illustrating the same truth can be told one after the other before the central truth is asserted. Good stories can be used in deductively organized sermons to illustrate each point used in the development of the central theme.<sup>8</sup>

The final suggestion is more of an affirmation than advice. Working with students will assist one in the development of a clearer and more forceful style of communication. The reason for this is that students will force the jettisoning of theological jargon and preacherisms from conversation. Fresh language is essential for communication with students. This practice will lead to a more attractive style for preaching to the general populace. Be aware, however, that campus jargon can be as much an obstacle to communication in the churches as can theological jargon. The ideal is to employ words that most people in the congregation will readily comprehend with minimal chance of misunderstanding.

Campus ministers who enjoy preaching as an integral part of their ministries will want to grow increasingly effective in the preaching role. Those who intentionally stay in touch with the needs of all people, seek to develop sermons with maximum Biblical authority, and develop themselves as storytellers likely will reach a higher level of effectiveness in preaching.

NOTES

1. The writer is sensitive to the fact that both female and male campus ministers may have opportunities to preach. Masculine personal pronouns are used generically in this article.
  2. Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 90-98.
  3. Richard White, *Biblical Preaching: How to Find and Remove the Barriers* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1988), 70-71.
  4. *Ibid.*, 77-79.
  5. David Brown, *Dramatic Narrative in Preaching* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1981), 23-25.
  6. Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1980).
  7. Matthew 26.
  8. Bruce Salmon, *Storytelling in Preaching: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 61-82.
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