Assist Me to Proclaim
A Practical Guide to Preaching for Lay Ministers and Local Pastors in the United Methodist Tradition
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Notes

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With so many books already published on the subject of preaching you might be thinking, "What does this bozo think he can add to the conversation?" Maybe you are thinking since God has called you to preach what is all the fuss and concern over "how" about? After all, doesn't God promise to give us the words to say at the right time?

But for many of us the journey to the pulpit is one filled with anxiety and uncertainty. *What am I going to say? How am I going to select a scripture? How can I be sure that what I am saying is true?* Each one of us at some time either has or will experience these questions and need to find some answers.

That is why I am offering this book. I am not trying to say, "Here is how you do it." Rather what I am seeking to provide is a resource specifically for those who are beginning this journey. I want to give some basics to hopefully provide some useful tools for those who are coming to the preaching moment either for the first time, or are at least relatively new.

It is also my hope that this text will not be lost on those who have been preaching for a while. I pray this will be a handy resource for revisiting some fundamentals that perhaps have gotten pushed away over the years. I am also attempting to offer some new insights from some of the best preachers we have today.

At the very least, I intend this to be a starting point for an ongoing journey and a continuing conversation. In the art of preaching no one ever arrives at the point where they cannot improve, nor never need to revisit the basics. It is my desire that this book of basics may help to ease the one who is beginning, and remind the one already on the path. May all of our preaching be the best it can be each and every time we attend to the pulpit, always for the glory of God, whom has called us.
Chapter 1

What Makes a Preacher?
A Reflection on Selections from the Letters to Timothy

Some Practical Advice

The Letters to Timothy, taught historically by the church to be written to Timothy by the apostle Paul, gives some good direction and instruction as to what makes a preacher. Three passages in particular I want to consider are 1 Timothy 4: 6-16, 2 Timothy 2: 14-15, and 2 Timothy 4: 1-5. Let's take a look.

1 Timothy 4:6-16

If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance.

For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. These are the things you must insist on and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.iii

We see in the passage some good, practical advice from a seasoned "preacher" to one who is just beginning. First of all, Paul admonishes Timothy to not give attention to false stories – godless myths, old wives' talesiii as they are called in the passage. Rather, Timothy is instructed to train himself to be godly.iv Second, we see some practical advice about what we are to be preaching. Verses 10-11 reminds Timothy in what he has put his hope - Jesus Christ as the Savior. Then Paul exhorts him to Command and teach these things.v These are valuable lessons, not only to the beginning preacher, but also to the seasoned veteran. The pulpit is not the place for idol talk or ramblings about whatever happens to be found on the heart of the preacher in that moment. Rather it is the place where the word of God, the gospel message, is to be proclaimed to the people of God by the one whom God has called to bring that message.
Third, in this passage we see Paul tell Timothy "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." It is accepted that Paul is speaking to Timothy with regard to his physical age. For many reading this, age is no longer an issue; for others folks in the congregation lovingly remind them of how "young" they are.

But another way of looking at this instruction is not only from the standpoint of physical age, but also our "age" in preaching. What I mean is there are some of us who are "young" chronologically but who have been preaching for several years. There are others of us who are "older" in age, but are just starting our ministry of preaching. One question we are all likely to receive whenever we stand in a new appointment is, "So how long have you been preaching?" From the response to this question, folks in our congregation will already be sizing us up before we get to the first sermon.

The instruction that is given regarding age is appropriate for all of us, no matter what "age" camp we happen to find ourselves. Preachers are to set an example, not only in how they preach, but also how they live. We find ourselves "preaching" not only from the pulpit, but also in the ways we handle difficult situations and congregants, how we act in meetings, how we present ourselves in public, and how engaged we are in the ongoing life and relationships that make up our congregations. This is not to say that we as preachers do not have the right to a private life. But what it does say is that the call to preach is not a call that is only lived out one day a week in a particular hour from a particular place.

Finally, Paul admonishes Timothy to "Watch your life and doctrine closely." This goes back to what we were just talking about, but also adds another dimension – to watch closely what we proclaim as a preacher. It is of the utmost importance that what is proclaimed in the name of God is not simply one's opinion, but is scriptural. Keep a close watch that the message that is presented as being "from God" is, in fact, "from God," and not simply a rant from the mind and mouth of the preacher.

This notion of doctrine brings me to one other point. For Paul writing to Timothy the issue of doctrine was an issue of other religions having influence on the Christian message and witness. But it can also be argued that Paul might be referring to other issues within the Church with which he had been engaged. Issues such as what can be eaten, circumcision, and understanding how one comes to Christ, had all been argued by Paul with others. We have to understand that Jesus never did the Jewish rituals were themselves wrong, just the blind following of the rituals with no thought as to what they meant. But for some the keeping of the Jewish rituals were essential to becoming Christian. This was not the message Paul understood to be in the gospel of our Lord. As a result, we might say that we witness our first "denominational" argument! (Sort –to – speak, of course.)

My point is simply this: there are many different Christian denominations around today. These denominations bring a wealth of different views they each bring to scripture. We are not in competition with them. In fact, I believe that Christianity is richer for the diversity of scriptural beliefs, interpretations, and rituals that each group brings. However, the preacher in the United Methodist Church is charged with preaching within the guides of what we believe as
United Methodist. If, as a preacher, you find a belief or a doctrine to be inconsistent with what you believe to be "true," then maybe that is the time for you to relinquish the preaching office in the United Methodist Church and seek another denomination that fits what you believe.

The next section of practical advice we receive from the Letters to Timothy comes from 2 Timothy 2: 14-15 and concerns arguing over words. Let's take a look:

Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Now a great deal of interpretation can be done over these verses, specifically as to what Paul is referring about with the statement "quarreling about words." But the lesson that we can take from this passage for us in this moment is simple, yet profound: Be careful in how we speak. Rather than presenting ourselves as being one who bumbles around, we should seek to present ourselves as one whom God has called, and who can be entrusted to proclaim a true word from God.

Folks in the congregation that you will serve are yearning for this. They want to hear from God. They come with questions, concerns, and issues. They come with joys, celebrations, and thanksgivings. They come from hectic weeks and from weeks that went by as gently as a summer breeze. They come from work and retirement. They come from higher formal education and no formal education. They come from all areas of life and society, and they all are seeking one thing from the pulpit – a word from God from someone whom they can trust to bring such a word. It is the task of the preacher to prepare, to study, to pray, and to seek so as to be enabled by the Holy Spirit to bring God's word to God's people.

The final passage from the Letters to Timothy I want to consider are found in 2 Timothy 4: 1-5. Here is the passage:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. viii

The cry from Paul to Timothy is to proclaim the message. This seems like a no-brainer. Of course the preacher should proclaim the message given to them. But there are seasons in the life of the church that go beyond anything found on a liturgical calendar. There are times when we are called to make a stand in society at large. There are times when a word of comfort, rebuke,
encouragement, challenge, push, pull, convincing, and "stay the course" will all need to be heard. It is in these times that the preacher shows just how faithful of preacher s/he is.

The pulpit is not the place to hurl "biblical stones" at the congregation. It is not the place where your sole agenda is proclaimed. Rather, it is the place where the true word of God is delivered to God's people; for that time, in that congregation, for whatever that congregation is facing and needs to hear. The admonition is not simply to convince, rebuke, and encourage, but with the utmost patience in teaching.\textsuperscript{15}

We live in a world in which information is in overdrive. Bookstores carry all kinds of religious, spiritual, and self-help books. The Internet is always just a click away with a worldwide web of writings, sites, reviews, movies, and pictures all proclaiming something they claim as "truth." But we as Christian preachers are not called simply to offer self-improvement. We are called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are called to proclaim the message God gives to us to proclaim. Make sure it is from God. Make sure it is done in the right spirit of God. Make sure, as much as any human being can, it is truly "God's word to God's people." Preach in strength and courage the message the congregation needs to hear in whatever season they find themselves. Do it boldly, but "with the utmost patience in teaching."\textsuperscript{15}

That point is not lost on the life the preacher lives. As we began in the first passage we considered, we return in this final. Paul spoke of this from one angle in the First Letter to Timothy. Now in the second, Paul instructs Timothy, almost bluntly, \textit{As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.}\textsuperscript{16} There is the full weight of the ministry that the preacher brings with him or her to the pulpit every time they ascend to it to preach. That ministry must, as much as we can, resemble the life we are calling out to live. Sure, we make mistakes. Sure, we fail and fall at times. But to make a mistake is not the same as to live a mistake. And that is what Paul wants Timothy to understand. The preaching calling is not only to a preaching event. The preaching calling is to a way of life.
Chapter 2

What Does a Preacher Look Like?

What does a preacher "look like"? I raise this question because in my own ministry I have had the charge leveled against me "You sure don't look like a preacher." Now when I am in jeans and a t-shirt walking around the church office because I have come in from mission work with my congregation's United Methodist Men's group and there is a visitor there, I can almost understand the statement. But it does leave me with the question "Well, what is a preacher supposed to look like?"

I begin with such a commentary not to get us down the track of looking professional, or what do we wear when we preach. Rather I want us to engage this question further and more theologically. Whether we care to admit it or not, we all have an "image" of the preacher in our minds. Further, these images influence how we approach and carry out the preaching task. It would be truly helpful to take some time to consider what images are out there, and how truly we see ourselves as a preacher.

Dr. Tom Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, wrote a wonderful resource for all preachers entitled The Witness of Preaching. In it, he develops what he calls the Images of the Preacher. In this Dr. Long states that understanding what image we have of the preacher will "prompt them [us] to emphasize certain tasks of ministry and to minimize others." Further, Long claims that these images will lead us to speak and act in certain ways. I find these images to be very helpful and want to share them with you.

The first image Long presents is that of The Herald. The Herald image holds the view that the preacher is proclaiming a message directly from God. As such, the Herald holds preaching in a very high theological view. It has the notion that the preacher is the mouthpiece for God. The preacher is speaking, but God is doing the proclaiming. As a result, the preacher that holds the image of the Herald has two main responsibilities. The first responsibility is to get the message straight. The second is to speak it plainly. A good example of the Herald image is the preacher/theologian Karl Barth.

The second image Long presents is that of The Pastor. The way Long describes this image is "If the herald image focused on the biblical word, on being faithful to God's message, then the pastor image moves all the way to the other end of the preaching spectrum and focuses on the listener, of the impact of the sermon on the hearer." The preacher that holds the image of The Pastor is going to be concerned with how the sermon speaks to the listener's life. He or she will ask questions like "What does my congregation need to hear today, for this moment?" The preacher will know their people and what they are facing, and seek a scriptural message that speaks to those needs and issues. A good example of the Pastor image is Adam Hamilton.
The final image that Long presents is that of *The Storyteller/Poet.* Preachers with this image tell stories and narratives from the pulpit to proclaim the sermon. But they are not limited to simply telling stories. Rather they shape the sermon around the form of a story. Long says:

*Other advocates of this image move beyond the notion of stories and illustrations in sermons to the more expansive concept of shaping the whole sermon in a storylike way. Sermons are not just lists of ideas placed one after another like beads on a string. They are shaped according to some logical pattern. The typical speech is arranged around a major idea or thesis, with subpoints serving this main thought – one, two, three and so on. What if it is true, though, that people listen and learn most deeply not when the ideas come at them in one-two-three fashion, but when ideas flow along like the episodes of a narrative? Sermons, then, would be most powerful when shaped according to such patterns.*

Storyteller/Poets tell the story of scripture and tell the story of the message of the sermon. A good example of the Storyteller/Poet is Barbara Brown Taylor.

Now it is important for me to note that in his book Dr. Long does not advocate for any one of these images above another. He discusses strengths and weaknesses of each. I, too, have noticed strengths and weaknesses of each and feel it is important for us to discuss them.

The strength of the Herald image is in its reliance on scripture and view of the preacher as being the instrument through which God speaks. This view helps to keep the preacher from claiming "the spotlight" and keeps focus on the scripture and God's word that emerges from it. A weakness can be that the preacher with the Herald image can fail to connect with his or her congregation in the preaching moment. The Herald may not clearly say how the scripture's message impacts daily life, events in society, or how it speaks to current issues. Sometimes the Herald may ignore the people in the pews for the sake of the scripture itself. As a result, the congregation may fail to connect the "word from God" with their lives.

The strength of the Pastor image is that the preacher that holds this image will more often than not connect the sermon with the lives of their congregants. This will help the congregation to see how the Bible is relevant for today, and seek to help them answer some of the issues they are facing. But herein also lies the weakness. Sometimes preachers who hold the Pastor image do not know their congregations as well as they would like to think. For this to be done well, the preacher must truly know their congregants. There is also a tendency to subjugate scripture to human experience.

The strength of the Storyteller/Poet is that narrative can be a very effective way to communicate. We remember stories. We connect with stories. Stories can move us. The weakness is that the preacher that holds the Storyteller/Poet image may, as Dr. Long states, tend to overlook non-narrative parts of the scriptures. I will also add that sometimes preachers that hold this image tend to tell stories that do not connect well with the scripture they have chosen, upon which they are attempting to preach.
It is very easy for us to take these images and gravitate towards one. That is natural, and may help us to understand better how we view ourselves as a preacher and how we approach the preaching task. But I think it is important for us to not think of one as being "better" or "worse" than another. As illustrated before, each one of them has strengths and weaknesses. This is true of our preaching images as well. Each one of us has strengths we bring with us to the pulpit, as well as weaknesses that the pulpit exposes.

Further, I believe there are other images we may add to these, as well as "sub-images" we might be able to derive from these. To consider how we view "the preacher" and how we view ourselves can give us great insight to how we approach the preaching task, and help us to see the strengths we possess, as well as to begin to see and address our weaknesses.
Chapter 3
Forms of the Sermon

The term homiletics means "related to preaching." Homiletics, as a subject, is the study of preaching. As a part of the study of homiletics, there is the study of various forms that the sermon may take. These forms are very much akin to styles of writing. Some of these forms actually come from styles of literature.

The reason why we study forms of the sermon is so that we can have an understanding of the various ways there are to craft the sermon. Some styles may be more helpful than others depending on what the sermon is addressing. Further, some styles may be more helpful than others to us based on what image of the preacher we hold, as well as our own personalities. Finally, congregations may be able to connect better with one style over another. That is why it is good to have a working knowledge of these forms and how they are used.

The forms that we will be exploring are not all - encompassing. There are other forms out there, but these I have found to be the most helpful. We will look at each form in turn, as well as some examples of the users and/or authors of each, where helpful. The forms we will be exploring are the "Deductive Traditional Three Point," the "Inductive Narrative," and the "Lowry Loop," as well as a few basic patterns to aid in the construction of the sermon.

The first form we will explore is the most basic, and yet arguably the most widely used. This form is known as the Three Point sermon. I believe its origins may be traced back to St. Augustine, who wrote the first guide to homiletics entitled On Christian Doctrine. In the section called "Book 4" Augustine wrote more practically about the art of preaching and what the sermon should accomplish. Augustine allowed for the use of classical rhetoric in the delivery of a sermon.

A point of classical rhetoric was to "teach, delight, and persuade" the listener. As such one has the formulation for an early three-point sermon. An example is below of an outline of what this form might look like:

- Scripture reading - John 3:16
- Point 1: Teach  This is how God displays God's love for the world.
- Point 2: Delight  Tell a story about the love of a son/ connect story with love of God to us (the world).
- Point 3: Persuade  How do we respond to the love that God shows us?
- Conclusion

This basic form becomes the standard form in preaching up to the mid twentieth century. The definitions of each point of "teach, delight, persuade" may not have always been employed, but their notions and movements were always present. Further, the three points serve to support and explain the main thesis of the sermon. A second example of this in an outline might look like:
- Scripture: John 3:16

- Thesis: God shows God's love for the world by sending God's Son.
  
  - Point 1: God ultimately loves the world.
  
  - Point 2: We know that God loves the world because Jesus came.
  
  - Point 3: We can understand how and experience God's love of the world by looking to Jesus.

- Conclusion

This form of three points that outline, argue, or seek to prove a main thesis is known as *deductive style*. It deduces from the main thesis the points that contribute to its whole.

The strengths of this form are that when it is done well the notions, arguments, examples, and such move logically to support the main thesis. It can be easy to follow and understand. The weakness is that few folks really think in this format. When it is not done well, it can be seen as disconnected and uninteresting to those who hear it.

It is important to note that this form has evolved to sometimes having more or less than three points. The basis of the style, however, is not necessarily in the number of points used. Rather, it is a form where a thesis, or main idea, is given, points are used to support the thesis, and a conclusion ends the sermon with "Here's what you should do as a result."

The second style we will observe is known collectively as the Narrative. There are several forms of preaching that can fall under this category, but there are two we will work with primarily. Dr. Fred Craddock introduced the first form in his work *As One Without Authority*. Dr. Eugene Lowry developed the second form in his work *The Homiletical Plot*.

Craddock's approach in this narrative form is called "inductive." Rather than the deductive form of a traditional three-point sermon that makes a claim and then offers points to support that claim, the inductive form uses stories, illustrations, and images to arrive at the main thesis (main idea) in different ways. Craddock argues that people do not naturally think in a deductive way. Rather, when folks have a conversation, that conversation may be on a specific topic, but we do not naturally outline the conversation with points that move succinctly through. Folks tell stories, use metaphors, relate experiences, and the like to move through the conversation. The conversation becomes an interweaving of thoughts and ideas that allow each participant in it to arrive at their own conclusions.

Craddock believed that a sermon built on such inductivity would have greater connectivity with the listeners. It would allow listeners to take the trip with the preacher and arrive at the conclusions for themselves with the preacher. This style was enormously popular when it first appeared in the 1970's. Folks were tired of the three-point sermon, and this was something new. It engaged the listeners in a way that they had not experienced before.
A model for this form might look like this:

![Diagram of a model for a narrative form with arrows connecting an illustration, main thesis, negative example, an experience, and personal story or another story not from the congregation.]

Each arrow passes through the main thesis letting its individual aspect lead the listener to it. These aspects might be:

- a story that illustrates an aspect of the main thesis
- an illustration that helps to demonstrate an aspect of the main thesis
- a shared experience where we found the main thesis to be true
- an example of what can occur when the main thesis is not held or followed

These examples can be endless, and are only limited by the imagination and skill of the preacher.

There are strengths to this form. It allows listeners to have an active role and be a participant in the sermon, both directly and indirectly. Further, it can be argued that, this form does connect with the way some folks think. Thus it can be helpful in connecting the scripture with the lives of the ones who hear it.

But it also has its weaknesses. It relies on the preacher connecting the stories and illustrations in such a way that all the listeners get to the same point at their own times by their own roads. Further, stories can themselves be a distraction to the listener, especially if the story does not connect well to the scripture at large. Also, if the story used in the sermon is about a shared experience with the members of a particular congregation, what about those who do not share that experience? Finally, in this form the preacher may or may not make a direct claim about the text. This can leave the listeners confused as to "what was the point?"

The inductive style of the narrative form can be very useful when employed with some thought and consideration. The preacher that uses it also needs skill in the weaving of the stories
and illustrations to be able to help ensure that their listeners connect so that everyone gets to where the sermon is going. It can be a very effective way of engaging the congregation to think and to use their God-given reason and experience in light of scripture and tradition.

The final form we will explore is known as the "Lowry Loop." This is also a narrative form. It takes some of the understanding that we explored in the inductive style, but adds its own dimension. For example, in Craddock's inductive style several stories and illustrations are presented that pass through the main thesis of the sermon. In the Lowry Loop, the main thesis is consistent throughout, but there are questions and twists that are added. As Lowry states "Rather, the task [of the sermon] is to shape the idea [main thesis] in such a manner as to keep its direction appropriately focused and its integrity from becoming diffused."

"Now this is all great," you may be asking, "but what exactly is the 'Lowry Loop'?'" Eugene Lowry developed this style in the early 1980's. The flow of the sermon is written in the same manner as television shows. It moves in stages that Lowry calls "Upsetting the Equilibrium," (aka "Oops,"), "Analyzing the Discrepancy," (aka "Ugh,"), "Disclosing the Clue to Resolution," (aka "Aha,"), "Experiencing the Gospel," (aka "Whee,"") and "Anticipating the Consequences," (aka "Yeah,"). This is diagramed in the form of a "loop."

The stages move the listener through the sermon so that they "arrive" at the main thesis for themselves, but with guidance. Each stage has a purpose. Each stage must be moved
through deliberately, but also smoothly. Each stage must connect to the one behind and in front of it.

The first stage is known as "Upsetting the Equilibrium," or more affectionately as the "OOPS!" stage. It is in this stage that ambiguity is introduced. This might be a question that brings tension or conflict that engages the listeners. It is important that this ambiguity is felt and experienced by those listening, not only the preacher.

An example of such an "Oops" might come from a look at John 1: 12-14. Jesus is teaching his disciples and says:

> Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

A question that can be introduced from this text to upset the equilibrium, or cause an "oops," is "Can we really be expected to do greater things than Jesus?" or "Can I really ask for anything from Jesus and he do it?" One would need to pick one question and develop it in this section, but I think we can get the general idea of what happens here in the "Oops!" stage.

The second stage in the Lowry Loop is known as "Analyzing the Discrepancy," or as it is better known, the "UGH!" stage. Lowry states "In most sermons this process is the most lengthy of the five, often requiring as much sermon delivery time as all the other stages combined." This stage seeks to answer the question of "why?"

This is where we really wrestle with the text. Continuing to use the passage example from above, in this stage we might ask "Why would Jesus say this?" Or we might ask "Why can I ask for anything in Jesus name?" Maybe we could move from "why" to "how" and ask "How would I do some work greater than Jesus?" This is where our study of the passage really shows itself.

We will bring to this moment our theological understandings, our work gleaned in the study of this passage, and the conversations we have had with commentaries. This is one of the reasons why this stage requires so much time in the sermon. This stage is where we are connecting the "Oops" we discovered in the scripture to the lives of those who are listening. (And our own lives as well, mind you.)

Further, as Lowry teaches, this stage is central to the whole sermon. If a sermon is weak in this form, it is usually because there was a weak diagnosis of the scripture upon which the rest of the sermon is built. One has to be careful in building this stage, and communicating this question to the congregation for the life of the sermon.

The third stage in the Lowry Loop is the "Disclosing the Clue to Resolution" stage, also known as the "AHA!" This is where the explanation learned from wrestling in the UGH! stage is proclaimed. This is the turning point in the loop. Lowry explains "Stage two of the sermon presentation process moves with an increasingly felt 'necessity' toward some kind of release, toward the revealing of the missing link. Once disclosed, matters are seen in a different light."
When one preaches this form, and does it correctly, the revealing of this "Aha!" is not simply known by the congregation, but is experienced by the congregation. Lowry also has a particular form of this "Aha!" moment where an explanation is not simply given. Rather, the explanation is accomplished by what he calls "the principle of reversal." It is a way of presenting what is discovered. By engaging the principle of reversal, one might say, "You thought it was this, but it is really this." It turns the way we view or understand something completely around.

We can see Jesus in his teachings doing this. There are several passages where Jesus says "You have heard it said...but I say to you..." This is reversing what is commonly perceived or believed. This can bring its own understanding, as well as its own questioning.

The fourth stage is known as "Experiencing the Gospel," or the "WHEE!" stage. Simply put, this is where the "Oops," "Ugh," and "Aha" are brought to the light of the gospel message. It is important not to rush through this stage. Let the message of the gospel speak to what has been disclosed. In using this form it is important that the ambiguity that was originally created in the first stage is not immediately resolved by the preacher alone. Rather, the preacher is still allowing the listeners to arrive at this with her or him.

Lowry calls the overlooking and rushing through this "Whee" stage as the homiletical short circuit. When the preacher jumps from the third stage to the fifth without proclaiming what the gospel message speaks to this, it causes the congregation to be lost. The result from this "short circuit" is that the sermon is weakened, if it doesn’t crash altogether.

As a point of clarity, when we are talking about the "gospel message" we are not referring simply to a passage from one of the gospel writers. Rather, we are meaning the entire good news that is the gospel message. We are seeking to answer, "How does the message of Jesus Christ speak to this?"

Let’s continue to look at John 1: 12-14, and consider the question of "How are we going to do greater work than Jesus?" The "Whee" stage might take this point and say "And here is the promise that Jesus gave to us. He will be with us. He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit." And then continue to preach the good news of how Jesus is empowering works that we do.

Now to be sure this is a simple example. But I think you can gather the idea here. If you are preaching this form, then you must allow time for the gospel message to bear on what has been revealed. This way the listeners can follow the flow and experience this for themselves.

The fifth and final stage in this Lowry Loop is called the "Anticipating the Consequences" stage, or the "YEAH!" stage. This is where the sermon is given closure. Lowry says:

_In the sermonic plot, the clue to resolution [as presented in the previous stages] does not "solve" the issue; it only makes solution now possible. ... Whatever the issue, this final phase of sermonic closure will suggest a new door opened, the new possibility occasioned by the gospel._
Put simply, the fourth stage pronounces what God is doing (the gospel message) in relation to what has been discovered and disclosed in the sermon. Stage five seeks to answer the question of what do we, the listeners, do with it. To put this together: Now that I have been told that Jesus said I would do greater works than he did, have wrestled with "why," I am to do these works, have seen the "how," and then heard what God is doing with this, now this is what I am empowered to go do. In the old preaching illustration of flying an airplane, this stage is landing it. The smoother the landing, the better the overall flight is perceived. No good pilot wants to lose passengers along the way.

This has been simply a brief overview of the form known as the Lowry Loop. It is a basic explanation of it. There are concerns with this form, as there are with each of them. The concerns that I raise are, like the Craddock form, it relies on stories and illustrations, which may or may not be effective in connecting the ideas of the sermon with the listeners. Also each stage must be handled specifically and carefully to ensure a smooth flow of the sermon. However, when one learns to use this form well it can be powerful in wrestling with passages that may have become overly familiar by giving direction for putting a new "loop" on it.

Along with the three forms mentioned before, as well as the developers of those forms, let us look at some basic patterns for the sermon. These patterns have no "developers" as such, but rather have emerged from many, many years of preachers engaged in preaching.

Clifton F. Guthrie in his book From Pew to Pulpit outlines several patterns. Some of the patterns Guthrie discusses emerge from the forms previously mentioned in greater detail here. However, there are a few patterns not mentioned in the forms discussed that can be quite effective and simple to understand.

The first is what Guthrie calls Pattern, Breaking of Pattern, Resolution. This pattern is akin to the Lowry Loop, but not as involved. In the "Pattern, Breaking of Pattern, Resolution," the preacher organizes their sermon in a way that builds up direction, and then suddenly reverses it. This is a common technique in many of Jesus' parables. Consider the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 20: 1-16), or the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14-30).\[vi\]

The second pattern is called Compare and Contrast. Just as in literature, this pattern compares and/or contrasts two positions, ideas, or notions. It can also be worded as "either/or" or "both/and." It is a simple way to draw out a point for the congregation.\[vii\]

A final pattern to consider is simply to follow the form found in the passage of scripture that has been read.\[viii\] Let the text shape how your sermon will flow. Notice the transitions, the language, and the emotions that are found in the text and organize your sermon accordingly. This is easier accomplished when the scripture reading is longer than simply a couple of verses.

As I began by saying, there are more forms for the sermon out there, but these are very helpful. It is important to spend some time thinking about the form of the sermon you are preaching. The form is the connectivity that gets the preacher from one point to the next, connects the scripture and illustrations, and helps define what illustrations will be used.
You may find that the form of how you preach, "your homiletic," may not squarely fit into one of these categories. That is okay. But do give your form a little thought. Think about why you do what you do in a sermon. Don't be afraid to experiment with various forms. You might discover that one form may fit a particular sermon better than another.
Chapter 4

Exegesis

The basis for the creation of a good sermon is exegesis. But what is exegesis? Exegesis is the study of the passage of scripture in order to hear what it says. The key is to "hear what IT says." Exegesis is the opposite of "eisegesis" Put simply, exegesis is coming to a passage of scripture and studying it carefully to understand what the scripture itself is saying. Eisegesis is when one comes to a passage of scripture and interjects what s/he thinks, and the opinions and understandings s/he has into the text.

Dr. Thomas Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University gives us a great method for exegesis. He also gives us a great tool to move from exegesis to the creation of a sermon. It is called "Focus and Function." Dr. Long outlines his process in his book The Witness of Preaching.

Now this does not replace the need for an understanding about the form of a sermon. With regard to understanding the need for sermonic form Dr. Long states:

*Despite the fact that it passes by relatively unnoticed, form is absolutely vital to the meaning and effect of a sermon. Like the silent shifting of gears in a car's automatic transmission, sermon form translates the potential energy of the sermon into productive movement, while remaining itself quietly out of view.*

The way the sermon is preached impacts how the sermon is heard. But how do we decide on how to preach the sermon? Dr. Long believes that, in the simplest understanding, the sermon form is the organizational plan for what will be said and done in the sermon. A wonderful way to decide on a sermon form is to engage in some really good exegetical work in preparation for the sermon, and let the form emerge from that work.

Dr. Long constructs an outline of how to exegete in preparation for a sermon.

Outline of a Brief Exegetical Method for Preaching

I. Getting the Text in View

A. Select the text

B. Reconsider where the text begins and ends

C. Establish a reliable translation of the text
II. Getting Introduced to the Text
   D. Read the text for basic understanding
   E. Place the text in its larger context

III. Attending to the Text
   F. Listen attentively to the text

IV. Testing What Is Heard in the Text
   G. Explore the text historically
   H. Explore the literary character of the text
   I. Explore the text theologically
   J. Check the text in commentaries

V. Moving toward the sermon
   K. State the claim of the text upon the hearers (including the preacher)

We will consider each of these points in turn to understand what they bring to our study of the scripture.

The first section of this exegetical method is *Getting the Text in View*. It is in this section that the first three points of exegesis are engaged: selecting the text that will be preached, reconsidering where the selected text begins and ends, and finding a translation of that text that is reliable and conveys the meaning of the scripture.

The place any preacher should begin is selecting the text. There are different ways of accomplishing this. The first way is what is known as a "continuous reading." This way involves preaching through the Bible book by book. In this way the preacher would be in a particular book of the Bible preaching on a passage from that book. The next week the preacher would continue where the scripture reading had finished the week before. An example would be preaching from the book of Genesis. In the first sermon the preacher might have preached on the first creation account found in 1:1-2:4. The next sermon would then begin with 2:5 and might move through 2:25. The third sermon would then begin with 3:1 and so forth.

A second way Long presents for selecting the text is to use the Lectionary. The Lectionary is a listing of selected scriptures that follows the liturgical calendar. The lectionary itself is divided into a three-year rotation, with each year representing a cycle: "A," "B," and "C." By using the lectionary preachers are freed from the searching that can sometimes be frightening. It also engages the entire Bible with selected readings, and helps to establish a rhythm to the order of worship and preaching for the ongoing life of the congregation.

The third way Long presents in selecting the text is what he calls the "Local Plan." This is, in effect, a local church lectionary. In the planning of worship considerations are taken as to
the seasons of the Christian year, special celebrations, as well as denominational programs. Scriptures are selected that speak to these events and celebrations. Usually a schedule is devised and a plan created for preaching as a result of this work.

A final way Dr. Long presents for selecting a text upon which to preach is by what he dubs "Preacher's Choice". In this model the preacher chooses the text week to week. It might be based on needs the preacher recognizes are in their congregation for that moment, or on personal preferences or study that the preacher has engaged.

After using whichever method for selecting the scripture for the sermon, Long asks that the preacher reconsider where the text begins and ends in the passage. For the preacher who is using the continuous reading model, this might mean considering what verses should be used in the sermon. For the one who uses the lectionary this would mean looking at the verses that come before and after the passage assigned and asking if it should be expanded, or reduced. In considering the local plan, when the preacher approaches the text for that sermon are the verses selected appropriate for what the text is saying? And even for the preacher that chooses the text week to week - why did you choose to begin the reading here and end it here.

Sometimes we forget that the Bible was not originally divided by chapter and verses. The letters were written as a letter. The books were written as complete books. Placing the selected verses in the larger context helps to see what they are particularly saying, as well as the overall message the book proclaims.

The third point in this first section of Long's exegetical model is point C - "Establishing a reliable translation of the text." Where we each may have our favorite translations (KJV, NIV, NRSV, and so forth), we have to realize that every translation is already an interpretation of the text. The books that make up the Bible were not originally written in Latin, English, Spanish, German, or Italian. The books of the Bible were originally written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. As such there are words that are found in Greek that do not have a direct translation into English. The editors of the individual translations have to interpret what a word in one of the original languages means in order to translate that word into English.

Most people who study preaching and biblical scholarship will tell you that working directly with the original languages of the text is the best method. But Dr. Long states that if working with the original languages is out of the question, then gather two or three good English translations such as the New International Version (NIV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the New Jerusalem Bible (NJV), as examples. Avoid paraphrases such as The New Living Bible or The Message, and other paraphrase editions, as these are not word for word translations of the original texts. Read the same passage in each of these and see if there is a word or phrase that is written differently. That will give you a clue that there was an interpretation as to the meaning of that word or phrase. This will give you a deeper understanding of that text. When selecting the text to be used in the sermon see which translation provides the clearest meaning and readability.

Section II of Long's approach is Getting Introduced to the Text. In this section are two points: "D. Read the text for basic understanding," and "E. Place the text in its larger context."
Point D, "Read the text for its basic understanding," begins once A-C have been completed. On the one hand, this step might seem obvious. However, I believe that sometimes we rush through this. Taking the time to read the text in order to gain a feeling for what the scripture is saying in the basics is key to correct exegesis. This is where we look up any unfamiliar words or terms. Also, we might ask questions of the passage, or particular parts of it.\footnote{biv}

Point E, "Place the text in its larger context," logically follows D. This is where we wrestle with the selected scripture in light of the chapter where it is found, and the book from which it comes as a whole. Sometimes a passage might appear in more than one place.\footnote{biv} Consider the \textit{Lord's Prayer}. It is found in both the gospels of Matthew and Luke, but it is recorded differently in each. What does considering this bring to light for the sermon? These types of issues are addressed in this point.

Section III is entitled \textit{Attending to the Text.}\footnote{bxi} This section has one point - F. "Listen attentively to the text." But what does this mean? Long says:

\begin{quote}
\textit{At this step in the exegesis, the preacher begins the interrogation of the text by asking every potentially fruitful question that comes to mind. This is not the place to worry about whether our questions are theologically correct or reverent enough. This is instead the place to bombard the text with every honest query we can think up.}\footnote{bxi}
\end{quote}

Not every question we might ask will be helpful. Not every question we ask will provide an answer. Not every question we ask will make it into the sermon. The point of doing this is to really wrestle with the scripture. These questions arise from the careful reading of the text that has been accomplished in points D and E. However, these questions also go beyond basic understanding of the text proper.

Dr. Long gives several examples of the types of questions a preacher may ask the text in this point in considering Amos 5: 21-24.

\begin{quote}
\textit{I hate, I despise your festivals,}
\textit{and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.}
\textit{Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,}
\textit{I will not accept them;}
\textit{and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals}
\textit{I will not look upon.}
\textit{Take away from me the noise of your songs;}
\textit{I will not listen to the melody of your harps.}
\textit{But let justice roll down like waters,}
\textit{and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.}
\end{quote}
Such questions might be.

- *What in the world does God have against festivals and songs? Is it that the people participating in them are sinful? But didn’t the father of the prodigal son throw a noisy, merry party for his sinful son? Why not here?*

- *What is the "character" or personality of God in this text? Is God petulant, or just deeply aggrieved? Is God always this offended, or has God simply had it?*

- *I can understand God’s anger in this text, but why does God explicitly refuse the people’s offerings? What kind of God turns down offerings?*

- *God wants "justice" and "righteousness." Are these two different things or two ways of emphatically saying the same thing?*

- *If Amos were to come worship at our church, would he deliver the same message?*

- *Would Amos even come to our church? Could his audience be the whole culture and not just the religious folk? Where are the festivals and solemn assemblies in society?*

- *Is there a way to make our festivals places of justice and righteousness?*

These are just a few of the questions that could be asked of this passage. Dr. Long gives these to us as examples. Here there are no "right" and "wrong" questions. That discernment will come as one moves through the exegetical work. Here is simply opening yourself and the scripture for questions to be sought and answers to be attempted.

But Long also goes further in this section and point that just asking questions of the passage as a whole. He also encourages the preacher to try other things as well.

- *Write a paraphrase of the text.*

- *Stand in the shoes of each character in the passage and try to see the events from their perspective.*

- *Look for things in the text that seem out of place, odd, or unusual.*

- *Look to see if the passage has a main thought or idea.*

- *Look to see if there is conflict, either directly in the text or behind it.*

- *Look for connections between the selected passage, and what comes before and after it.*

- *View the text through different "eyes." How might this passage look to a man, a woman, a child, a rich person, a poor person, etc.*

- *Think on the text as an answer, and then try to discern what the question might be.*
• Ask what the text is "doing." Is it singing, telling a story, explaining, warning, etc.

These are all examples of ways of attending to the text. This listing is not conclusive. The more you engage with this, the more ways you will discover. We will also look to some more ways when we discuss Dr. Anna Carter Florence’s model of Preaching as Testimony.

Section IV of Long's approach is Testing What Is Heard in the Text. This section comprises four points: G - "Explore the text historically," H - "Explore the literary character of the text," I - "Explore the text theologically," and J - "Check the text in commentaries."

Point G, "Exploring the text historically," seeks to place the passage in its context in history. Long states:

_Biblical text often speak of events in history, such as the reign of a king or the destruction of Jerusalem. Biblical text also have a history, in the sense that they were written in particular moments in history and sometimes modified as they were passed along from generation to generation. It is possible, then, maintain John Hayes and Carl Holladay, to speak both of 'the history in the text' and the 'history of the text._

Understanding what is happening in history, both in and of the passage being preached, helps to deepen our understanding of what is happening and its implications. (Also important to note, there can be wrong exegesis of text because one does not understand the history surrounding the passage.) Consider, if you will, the lowering of the paralytic through the roof as recorded in Mark 2:1-12. When we search a little of the historical context we discover that roofs of that day and place were thatch or covered, so the tearing of a hole in the roof would not have been as big of a deal in Jesus’ day as it would be if someone tore a hole in the roof of our house. Doing this work may also help answer some questions that arose from our brainstorming in the previous sections.

In point H we move to what Long calls "Explore the literary character of the text." "Here the preacher examines the text to determine both its literary character and its function." Is it poetry, a narrative, a history, a prayer, or a parable? Understanding what type of literary form it is helps us to understand a part of how we hear it and are to perceive it. There is a different function that we take away when we hear Jesus say "Faith is like a grain of mustard seed," verses the author of Hebrews saying "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." One is a _metaphor_ - Jesus is not saying faith is a mustard seed, while the other, found in the Letter to the Hebrews, is _teaching_ - this is a definition of faith. When we hear these verses, we hear them differently. When these verses were spoken/written, their intentions were different. Preachers need to understand those qualities when exploring a text for a sermon.

Point I, "Explore the text theologically," wrestles with, as Long phrases it, "...trying to discover what specific assumptions and claims are present in the text regarding God-in-relation-to-humanity." This is not trying to fit the text into a theological model we already have.
Rather, we are seeking to hear what the scripture says in connection with the theological understandings that Christianity has employed. Long also points out to us to look for key theological words like grace, faith, Lord, covenant, flesh, glory, and savior - to name a few. To consider what these words are saying, and to what they are pointing helps to bring the focus of what the passage is saying into more clarity and direction. This also helps, in my opinion, to keep the preacher from going too far afield in the direction s/he may personally see the passage heading (eisegesis).

The final point in section IV is J - "Check the text in commentaries." This might seem a little late in the exegetical work to be checking the commentaries. We might be tempted (as I am often) to go to commentaries sooner. But Long advocates to take time to do our own work before jumping to the commentaries. Then we bring the commentaries we use into our conversation with the text, rather than allowing the commentaries to do our work for us and accepting their understandings as the final word.

Now don't misunderstand what I am presenting. I am not advocating for not using commentaries. Commentaries provide a wealth of knowledge and scholarship that we as preachers do not have time to do every week. They research into historical and text critical models, bring cultural understanding, and biblical scholarship (the good ones do, anyway.) But preachers need to take the time to do the work of seeking for themselves what the passage is saying, wrestle with the questions, and attempt to find answers. Commentaries are a tool to be used to aid in that work - they are not the complete exegesis for the sermon in and of themselves. Please do not do, as one pastor told me she did, and take a commentary into the pulpit with you and read from it as the sermon itself. This pastor was shocked when their congregation failed to respond to the sermons. Gee - I wonder why...

The final section of Long's exegetical model is V - Moving toward the Sermon. It consists of a single section, but this section is where the exegetical work comes to its point. Point K is "State the claim of the text upon the hearers (including the preacher.)"

To begin with, there is something very important that Long states in this section. It is an important point of which we are all aware, yet sometimes can be found guilty of forgetting. When we state the claim of the text for the hearers, we are also stating the claim of the text for ourselves.

The sermon is first preached to the preacher. We are called from the congregation to proclaim the word God has given us to the congregation, but we are not removed from the congregation. The word of God for the people of God is just as much for us as for anyone else. The messenger is not above the message.

Also in this section there is a claim that must be made. Our studying of the scripture has produced many insights, ideas, and possible sermon directions. But they cannot all be preached in a single sermon. Dr. Long provides a powerful insight into the purpose and limit of exegetical work when he states:

*Exegesis can help us in many ways, but it finally cannot do what is most important: tell us what this text wishes to say on this occasion to our congregation. The preacher must decide this, and it is a risky and exciting decision.*
The practical implication of this is simple. When good exegetical work is done, many insights will be gleaned from the passage. Those insights can produce a multitude of sermons. An inexperienced preacher might try to preach them all in a single sermon and really make a mess of it. (I know, I have before.) But engaging in point K helps to work our way through the information and insights we have collected. There is a word that God has for God's people for this day that comes from the passage we have selected and earnestly poured over. It is the calling of the preacher, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, to discern that word and proclaim it. Dr. Long teaches "We are ready to move on to the creation of the sermon itself only when we can finish the following sentence: *In relation to those who will hear the sermon, what this text wants to say and do is...*" This is reason for point K, and it brings us to "Focus" and "Function."

**Focus and Function**

In the simplest terms, the "focus" is what the sermon is about; the "function" is what the sermon hopes to accomplish. It helps to write a "focus statement" and a "function statement."

Now Dr. Long does not give us license to create whatever focus and function we want and stick a scripture to it. He gives us three principles that guide the creation of the focus and function.

1. The focus and function statements should grow directly from the exegesis of the biblical text.
2. The focus and function statements should be related to each other.
3. The focus and function statements should be clear, unified, and relatively simple.

Consider a sermon for the first Sunday of Advent entitled "Advent through the Eyes of John the Baptist." Two passages that could be used for the sermon are Luke 1:1-17 and Matthew 3:1-6. An example of focus and function statements that could be written for this sermon are:

**Focus:** "Preparation" for John the Baptist was not preparing for the Christmas season; it was preparing for the coming of the Messiah.

**Function:** To challenge the congregation to move beyond seeing Advent as a preparation for Christmas, and see it as a call to be prepared for the coming of the Christ.

These focus and function statements clearly define what the sermon is going to be about (What John the Baptist was preparing for) and what the sermon may hope to accomplish for those who hear it (a challenge and correction to the way the season of advent is typically lived out.) The statements relate to each other. They both hinge on the same theme: "What does it mean to prepare?" And each statement is short, concise, and clear. By engaging these statements they help to define what can and cannot be in the sermon. If the sermon is about (focus) John the Baptist and what his call to be prepared is about, then using the scripture of Jesus turning water
into wine probably would not make a good illustration in this sermon. If the sermon is meant to challenge the congregation (function) to make holy use of the season of Advent, rather than using it as shopping days before Christmas, then talking about the joys of giving gifts may not be a good reference in this sermon.

As Long states: "It is important to realize that a good set of focus and function statements indicate where a sermon is headed: they are the description of the sermon's overall destination.\textsuperscript{3} Having clear focus and function can truly help in creating a clear sermon.

This exegetical approach lends itself to whatever sermonic form one may desire. Focus and function, as well as A-K can be employed with a traditional three-point sermon, a Craddock style, the Lowry Loop, or whatever shape a preacher's style dictates.

A second approach to exegesis that I want to consider is one taught by Anna Carter Florence in her book \textit{Preaching as Testimony}. Now it is important to note that Dr. Florence's method can be used alongside what we have learned from Dr. Long. But Florence's notions help to push us more in the ways we consider the text.

Dr. Florence is famous at Columbia Theological Seminary for telling her students to "stand in the text." Her approach is to really wrestle with what the text is saying. As a result she has some very helpful, albeit perhaps a bit unusual ways of approaching the text.

Anna Carter Florence takes a look at approaching the preaching task from the standpoint of those who have been marginalized. She was angered to learn while she was taking preaching in seminary that the contributions of women preachers, scholars, and theologians were being overlooked in some cases, outright ignored in others. This greatly influenced her approach to scripture and the preaching task.

She looks at the tradition of preaching as testimony. Florence is careful in how she means and defines testimony.

\textit{By testimony, I do not mean "telling your story" or "using personal illustrations," nor am I suggesting that a sermon is an appropriate vehicle for the preacher's memoirs. Instead, I am drawing on the classical definition of testimony as both a narration of events and a confession of belief: we tell what we have seen and heard, and we confess what we believe about it. A sermon in the testimony tradition is not an autobiography but a very particular kind of proclamation: the preacher tells what she has seen and heard in the biblical text and in life, and then confesses what she believes about it.}\textsuperscript{32}

Preaching as testimony, therefore, is proclaiming what the preacher has seen and heard from engaging the biblical text and what s/he have experienced in life. But how do we, in the words of Dr. Florence, "stand in the text?"
Dr. Florence believes that preaching in the testimony tradition actually simplifies the approach to the sermon a great deal. She offers five reasons for this:

1. *It keeps us focused.* We pay attention to our encounter with the biblical text and describe what we see, not what we want to see. (Exegesis vs. Eisegesis)

2. *It keeps us honest.* We confess what we believe about that encounter, not what we think we ought to believe.

3. *It keeps us grounded.* We testify to a particular person at a particular place and time, about one textual encounter: ours.

4. *It keeps us engaged.* We point to the Word, not to ourselves, because the encounter (not the office of the preacher or the act preaching!) creates its own invitation to the listener.

5. *It keeps us going.* Our preaching will never prove the Word, live out the Word, or live up to the Word. But it will seal our lives to the Word - which signals our desire to keep following, to keep practicing, to keep striving for one more day.

In this understanding, Florence offers exercises for attending to the text. These are ways of approaching and wrestling with the text to help the preacher see, hear, and experience it. It is important to understand from the onset that Florence is not advocating that the preacher do every one of these exercises for every sermon. Rather, they are each individual ways to approach and attend to the passage of scripture. I encourage you to keep an open mind. Perhaps the most radical suggestion to you is exactly the one you should try first!

- *Write it.* Florence advocates writing it by hand in a journal. (Preferably, one larger than a regular sheet of paper and no lines.) If something grabs your attention, make a note of it and follow up on it.

- *Pocket it.* Write out a copy of the scripture on a small piece of paper and carry it with you. Look at it often.

- *Memorize it.* Don't sit down and intentionally try to memorize it in a sitting. Rather, take it out when you are doing other things, preferably mundane things with your hands, like folding laundry, doing dishes, taking a walk, etc. Read it often and you will memorize it.

- *Underline it.* In the version that you have written in your journal underline, circle, mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Don't stop to edit yourself, just go with it. When you have completed the marking, go back and write out separately the words you have underlined. What do they suggest to you? What questions are you asking that the words are garbing you?

- "*Soccer Mom" it.* This is really wherever you spend a lot of time. Read the text that you carry with you in your pocket where you are - at the soccer field waiting to pick up the kids, the library, coffee shop, church, office, etc. Invite others around you just to read the text and tell you what they see and think. Make sure they know, especially if they are strangers, that you are not trying to get into a debate with them about what the text means. You simply what to hear the text through someone else's ears.
- **Dislocate it.** Carry the text to someplace you would not ordinarily go. How does the text sound different to you there?

- **Subtext it.** This is nonverbal communication that we all do all the time. Subtext is what we are thinking when we are speaking the words out loud. (Think of it like this. Someone asks you "How are you?" to which you respond "Fine" while you are thinking "I'm having a miserable day." That subtext will impact the way you said and communicated "Fine.") The same is true with scripture. What we are thinking about the text, or what we are thinking about, will influence how we say and hear the text.

- **Block it.** "blocking" is a theater phrase used to describe the physical movement and placement of actors in a scene. Take a look at this in the characters in the passage of scripture. What are they doing? Are they standing, sitting, kneeling? Are they facing each other? are they making eye contact? (What do you imagine here?) What does this communicate from the text?

- **Body it.** Move, dance, gesture, or whatever else comes to mind as you say or hear the words to the text.

- **Push it.** You will need a partner for this. Sit down facing each other with the text in front of you. Take turns reading it aloud while the other listens. Take turns reacting to the text. What did you see and hear in it? Now push your ideas and images as far as they will go, even to the point of the absurd or heretical, just to see what happens. The notion is to define where the boundaries are by crossing them with a safe partner, so that you can know where they are for the sermon.

- **"Other" it.** If you are a woman, read the text as a man. If you are a man, read it as a woman. Ask the other person of the different gender to reflect what they feel, hear, see. What do you gain from this understanding?

- **Counter it.** Every text is a response to other texts, somewhere, in scripture. They work together. What other text is your passage counting?

- **Create it.** Take your journal outside. Instead of writing, bring paints, pastels, charcoal, crayons, markers, colored pencils, whatever you wish. Read the text aloud several times and then draw whatever comes to mind. It does not matter if you are an artist or not. Give yourself a set amount of time to keep you from staring at the paper all afternoon. Draw one thing or several.

- **Study it.** How do you hear the text from the words of biblical scholars and theologians? What insights seem important to you?

These are ways that Florence suggests to approach, or attend, to the text - how to "stand in it." Next comes, "but how do I describe what I see?" She has some suggestions for that as well.
Florence outlines twelve exercises to help discern how to describe what is seen in the text. They are:

1. *Imaginate it.* Make a list of images that appear in the text such as light, water, salt, blood, seed, vine, etc. Let yourself "see" whatever images come to mind and write down everything that came to you.\textsuperscript{viii}

2. *Rewrite it.* Rewrite the text in your own words.\textsuperscript{vix}

3. *Slang it.* Rewrite the text in the way folks talk, or in a particular idiom of your congregation.\textsuperscript{sx}

4. *Character-sketch it.* Write a description of a character in the text, the author of the text, or the narrator.\textsuperscript{exi}

5. *Monologue it.* Pick a place to stand in the text. It might be a main character or a character on the fringes of the story, or one who doesn't appear in the text proper.\textsuperscript{exii}

6. *Dialogue it.* Write a dialogue for two people from the text.\textsuperscript{exiii}

7. *Text-jam it.* Extend the monologue or dialogue exercises by writing a short scene or dramatic piece based on the text.\textsuperscript{exiv}

8. *Letter it.* Write a series of short letters based on the text.\textsuperscript{exv}

9. *Dream it.* Keep a journal by your bed. Read the text before you go to sleep and pray in its words and images. In the morning, as soon as you wake up, write down what you can remember of your dreams.\textsuperscript{exvi}

10. *Journal it.* Write for a set period each day about the text. It can be in the stream-of-consciousness style. See what comes to mind.\textsuperscript{exvii}

11. *Change it.* Write the text as you wish it were. Change whatever bothers you. What does your rewrite tell you?\textsuperscript{exviii}

12. "*If-only*" it. Imagine what you would say about the text if you could. (For example "I would say this if-only Mr. and Mrs. X would not be offended...") What does this show you?\textsuperscript{exix}

One other area to approaching the text is to stand in the margins. What does the passage you are preaching on sound like to one marginalized? So often in the scriptures the very characters in the passage are themselves marginalized. What does seeing this passage through the eyes of a devout Pharisee who loves the law and has been taught a very specific way of worshipping God look like? How does what Jesus is saying sound to the woman with the issue of blood? How does this scripture speak to women today? A minority? A man? A woman? What do you learn from this?

As I mentioned earlier, Florence's approach does not circumvent the approach to exegesis we learned from Long. Rather, Florence's approach gives permission and a wide array of not-so-common resources for approaching the text and testifying as to what we see there.
These are just two approaches to exegesis. I have tried to walk you through the basis of each. There are many other forms and styles of exegesis. To a certain extent, each preacher has to develop an exegetical style that works for her or him. The main thing is to have one and use it. Don’t just pick a text and preach on it without any study and preparation. To do so does not honor the text, nor the calling with which God has entrusted the preacher.
Chapter 5

Using Images, Illustrations, and Stories

One of the basic questions that will be asked when actually beginning to create the sermon is what sermon aids to use, if any. By sermon aids, I am referring to images, illustrations, and stories. This can be answered in part by what form is being used for the sermon. For example – if the sermon is being preached in the Craddock form, stories, illustrations, and examples will have to be used – so the question is "which ones?" However, using traditional three-point sermon form does not require the use of stories – but it does not deny their use either. The decision on whether to use stories, illustrations, and images is really up to the preacher. This chapter's aim is not at discussing the "do or do not" issues of using such. Rather we will be exploring different types of examples for the sermon, their employment, and some cautions.

The types of examples that can be used are endless. The chapter's title gives us a clue to three – images, illustrations, and stories. Most sermon aids can be grouped into one of these three overarching categories. However, these presented here are by no means conclusive.

We will begin with images. How I am defining images are pictures, video clips, visual aids, and music, just to name a few. Images can create powerful feelings. When used successfully, they can draw out details that might be missed otherwise.

I preached a sermon at a revival once from 2 Chronicles 7:12-16. On the screen above the pulpit I had a picture of Creation from ceiling of The Sistine Chapel. But the picture was focused on the image of Adam and the image of God. There God was reaching, stretching out his hand to Adam, while Adam was lazily reclining with his arm not even fully extended. Here I used the image to help show how I see God reaching out to humanity, to us, while humanity, we, casually reach back. I used this to help explain the "If" of the passage. "IF my people, who are called by my name..."

It has been said, "A picture is worth a thousand words." But only if the thousand words the picture is worth are understood by all those seeing it. One can hang a beautiful picture of a sunrise on the walls of an art gallery. However, without a clue in the title, those viewing it can easily mistake it for a sunset. Also, be sure to understand copyright laws. Pictures, just like a book, can be copyrighted. No one wants to break a copyright law.

If using a picture in a sermon as an image for the sermon, be sure to connect what you want the listeners to "see" in it in the sermon itself. This can be done in many different ways and in many different places in the sermon. Using an explanation at the beginning can be a way of the picture speaking throughout the sermon. Placing in the context of a story in the middle can give impact at a specific point. Waiting until the end of the sermon can give the listeners a chance to wrestle with it for themselves. The flow of the sermon will give you some insight to the placement – just be sure to explain it somewhere and not leave it hanging. A picture’s “meaning” that is obvious to you may be oblivious to the listener.
Some preachers show a video clip before, during, or after a sermon. The video gives "live action" to the main thesis of the sermon. It can help connect a major point to a "real life" encounter. Like the picture, where the clip is placed in the sermon is up to you in working with the form. What was said about placement of the picture is true for a clip as well. Also, what was said about copyright for a picture is true for a video clip as well. And as with a picture, be sure to explain why it is there in some way. (This is called "setting it up.")

But there are a few more considerations for a video clip than with a picture. First of all, is length of the clip. There are no hard and fast rules for length. However, I believe the shorter the better. Make the clip's length no longer than absolutely necessary to illustrate your point. A lot of action that can take place in ten minutes of a clip from a movie that can draw attention away from the single point you are trying to make with the clip.

Also, when showing a clip from a popular movie, make sure it is a movie that would be acceptable for members of your congregation to go watch. A movie's subject matter can be a huge issue when using a clip for a sermon. Each congregation has its own culture surrounding this notion of acceptability, so be sure to understand it before showing a clip. There are worship clips specifically designed to be used in sermons and worship services that are available from a variety of publishers. Such publishers include Sermon Spice –www.sermonspice.com, Igniter Media –www.ignitermedia.com, and Blue Fish – www.bluefishtv.com.

Visual aids, sometimes called object lessons, can be a wonderful tool for teaching a point in a sermon. I am meaning the term "visual aid" to refer to real objects that can be used in the sermon as an image. Such items might include rocks, cell phones, computers, calendars, sporting equipment, a wooden staff, a glass of water...the list is endless. Again, as with any image, be sure to connect the image with the point of the sermon in a specific way.

There also is the question of how many visual aids to use in a sermon. My answer is whatever fits the sermon, but I believe the fewer the better. Now, if your visual aid is a rock, you might give every member of the congregation a rock to hold. That is still only using one aid. You might have three rocks on the altar, each represent a different word, aspect, or point of the scripture or sermon – that is still using one aid. What I am referring to is the use of several unrelated objects.

I heard a sermon once in which the preacher had a different visual aid for every point of her sermon. One was a sponge, one was a football, one was an old-fashioned telephone, and one was an ink pen. She did not connect the objects overall – just to whichever point she was making. This left the congregation confused. I heard several members talking after the service. The general conversation was "I thought she said that was like the pen." "No, she said that was like the football, this was like the pen." "No, that was the sponge..." They were not talking about the implication of the message on their lives, they were too busy trying to connect all the visual aids! Remember – visual aids support the sermon. The sermon should not have to support the visual aids.

The last image I want to share about is music. Music is already a huge part of most worship services. As far as using music as an image for the sermon is concerned, I am not referring to the anthem the choir sang, or the songs that the praise team led as a part of the worship celebration.
What I am talking about is the use of a song or another piece of music as an image directly in the sermon. One common way of doing this is by quoting a verse of a hymn or the line of a song, spoken as a part of the sermon. But there are other ways of doing this as well.

Sometimes a preacher who has a gift for singing might sing as a part of his or her sermon. I have heard a sermon set to a selection of Mozart's *Requiem*. I have heard sermons that were "interrupted" by songs that the choir sang. Each can be effective when planned and organized well.

The question becomes using songs that are not specifically religious. As with movie clips, make sure that the subject matter of the song is acceptable for the setting and congregation. Remember to check copyright laws, especially if printing the words in the bulletin or placing them on a screen. And please make sure it fits! I know, in your mind the meaning or point should be obvious. But believe me, a meaning that appears obvious to you may be oblivious to someone else (I think I have said that before…).

Images can be wonderful expressions that bring light to an idea or point in a sermon that is hard to understand or explain. Just take your time, consider what you as the preacher are comfortable with, try to understand what the congregation is comfortable with, and make sure to connect the image with the message it is meant to illuminate.

The next sermon aids we will discuss are illustrations. Illustrations are slightly different than stories. Stories are narratives that a self-contained. They can be told in or out of a sermon. An illustration, as I am defining it, is a metaphor, simile, or another explanation that only makes sense inside the body of the sermon.

Such an example of an illustration might be telling about the way the parts of the body work anatomically when preaching on 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31. It might be describing a rainbow when preaching on Noah. Using metaphors – "If you have faith the size of a grain of mustard seed…" or using simile – "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that is hidden in a field…", can be great ways of connecting an abstract idea with a tangible notion.

But just as with images, we must be careful. Make sure the congregation can easily connect to the notion of the illustration with its meaning in the sermon. I once heard a sermon in which the preacher was using the illustration of breaking down a big rig motor. He did not define terms, or explain what the parts did. The mechanics in the congregation were nodding their heads. Others were just nodding off.

There is also another issue with illustrations. It is very easy for the illustration to overpower the rest of the sermon. Now this can happen with images as well, but there is more of a chance of it happening with illustrations. The reason is that images tend to be more definite. A movie clip is going to last a certain amount of time, and then it will end. If you are holding a rock you don't have to describe what it is. A picture can be seen. A song can be heard.

But an illustration has to be described, expressed, and communicated verbally. If you have to spend more time explaining the illustration than preaching the sermon, it is probably a good indication that you need a different illustration.
Also, as alluded to in the example I shared of the preacher using the motor illustration, be sure your illustration fits the congregation where you are preaching. I once served a small, very rural congregation whose average age was 80. I was shocked when they did not get my iPod illustration. It thought was great. The iPod had just been released, and it was going to revolutionize how we bought, stored, and listened to music. To say using the iPod as an illustration flopped in the sermon would be a gigantic understatement.

But don’t take away from that example a notion of age. Age really had very little to do with it when compared to the location of the congregation. They did not have Internet access when I first arrived, other than dial-up modem. Computers were not widely used. You can’t assume anything about a congregation. You have to get to know them and the community where they are located to determine what types of illustrations will work, and what will not.

The last sermon aid we will discuss is the use of stories. Stories are self-contained events, either real or fictional, that can be told in a sermon, or on their own. Stories are some of the most widely used sermon aids.

Stories help connect the listener with the sermon. Everyone loves to hear a good story. Think about everyday life. Your best friend calls you one night just say, "I have got to tell you what happened to me the other day." What follows is a story. Some of my best memories from childhood involve the stories my grandfather use to tell me. He would tell me about his service in World War II, or read me about the adventures of a boy named Christopher Robin and his pooh bear named Winnie, and his favorite, the stories from the Bible.

The Bible is full of stories. Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the burning bush, David and Goliath, Daniel and the Lion's Den, Jesus walking on water, and Paul preaching in Athens, just to name a few. Of course, Jesus also told stories himself—what do you think a parable is but a story meant to convey a point.

But in the sermon we don't just tell stories from the Bible, or read stories from a book. We tell stories that we have heard from history, literature, or what we have read in the newspaper. We share the stories of the congregation, "Remember the time that the hurricane took the roof off the church," or "Remember the fellowship we had at Ted and Sue's house that Christmas." We tell stories about we have experienced. All of these can be wonderful moments of connection, for the congregation and yourself.

But be careful. There must be some ethical decisions about what stories we share. You should never tell a story about a member of the congregation that you learned about in a private conversation. Now that may be obvious, but the same is true for your family as well.

Dr. Long tells about a time he was working with a pastor individually on their preaching. That Sunday morning the preacher stood in the pulpit and began to tell about something that had happened with their son, when all of a sudden their son stood up and shouted "No Dad, not that one! Please, not that one!" Sure, there are great moments that happen in everyday life that can make for a great story in a sermon. Just make sure it is acceptable to the people who are characters in the story that it is shared.

Also in the stories that you tell, make sure you are not playing to negative stereotypes. Examples might include the bumbling father who can't handle the kids when mom is away, the
woman who is always emotionally driven, the greedy lawyer, the quack doctor, the awkward teenager. These can make folks feel uncomfortable at the least, and greatly offended at the worst. Along with this, don't always make yourself the "hero" or the "villain" of the story. To always be the one who is right makes for a lonely place on top of the pedestal you created for yourself. And to always be the one who is wrong digs a pit in which you do not really belong.

When using stories, always tell the truth. What I mean by that is, if you did not really experience it, then don't tell the story like you did. If you are not certain it really happened, make sure you convey that. Give proper credit to sources. Now this does not mean you need to list a bibliography for the sermon in the bulletin each week. There are some simple ways of handling this. If you were using a story you heard Rev. Ballard tell, then simply say something like "I once heard Rev. Ballard tell the story of..." If you are not sure it is true you can say something like "Well, I am not sure if this happened, but the story goes..." And if you have not, or did not experience what the story is about you might begin with "Now, I've never done this, but I imagine it to be like..." or "This didn't happen to me, but I heard tell..." You have been honest and can still use the story. The sermon will be better for it.

Finally, as was mentioned with illustrations, make sure the story or stories you use don't overpower the sermon. Now I know there are some wonderful examples of sermons preached as a story, and this is not about what I am referring. I am meaning when using stories as sermon aids, make sure that the sermon still controls the story, and not the other way around. The rule I gave for illustration is equally applicable here. If you have to use more time telling the story than preaching the sermon, you might need a different story.

I believe the most dangerous sermon aids can be stories. They can overpower a sermon more quickly than any other sermon aid. They can create as much confusion as a poorly written sermon on its own. They can lead the congregation down rabbit trails from which they never return. They can offend, open old wounds, and create tensions. However, with all that danger comes great reward. A good, well thought-out story can really connect the sermon with the listeners. Take some time, use some discernment, and a story can make a good sermon great.

These are just some of the sermon aids that are available. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the decision to use sermon aids, as well as what type is really up to you. Don't throw one in at the last minute. Take some time and thought. Each of these can be used in very effective ways to help the sermon connect to the lives of the congregation.
Chapter 6

Style and Communication

After the exegetical work is complete, the focus and function have been claimed, the text has been sat with, the form has been established, and the sermon has been written, it is still not complete. The sermon has not fulfilled its purpose until it has been preached.

This can be one of the most overlooked aspects of sermon preparation. I am a huge advocate for practicing your sermon. Video yourself, stand in front of a mirror, make an audio recording of yourself. You know what you are going to say, but how are you going to say it?

Every preacher develops his or her own style. It is a natural growth that arises from your personality. Now please note that style is not the same as form. There can be five preachers who all use the traditional 3-point form, but whose style is radically different.

Style is the way a preacher actually preaches. Style includes the way words are spoken, the manner in which the sermon is given, the use of notes, the type of notes, movement in the pulpit, gesturing, the type of language used, and the way the sermon flows.

The first aspect to consider is the words. There are different ways that words can be spoken. Now I am not simply referring to dialect here, though that is a part of it. What I am speaking about is the actual words that are used to convey meanings. Take for example the following quotes. "Excuse me, but I seem to have misplaced my fedora. Have you seen it?" verses "Hey buddy, have you seen my hat?" Both of these quotes mean the same thing, though the words they use are quite different. The words that you use are a part of your style. They go beyond educational level or geographic location and reflect a part of your personality.

But it is important to realize that words carry power and emotion. The words we use matter. There is an old saying that goes "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me." That is a bold-faced lie! Some of the most painful hurts we carry around with us come from words that were spoken to us. Some of the most precious memories we have come from expressions that were shared using words, too. Words are powerful and have powerful meanings!

Think about the words "hit," "smashed," and "collided." Imagine hearing a news commentator describing an automobile accident. What images are invoked in your mind if you heard "Two cars hit each other at the intersection of Hwy. 49 and Lafayette Street." What image emerges in your mind if you heard "Two cars smashed into one another at the intersection of Hwy. 49 and Lafayette Street." Did the image change? I bet it did. I imagine the accident more involved than the first. What if the commentator said "Two cars collided at the intersection of Hwy. 49 and Lafayette Street." The image changes again. The words used to describe a car accident carries with them different images and understandings. In each sentence the basis of what is being reported is the same – two cars had an accident. But depending on the words used, the image of the severity of the accident grows.
The same is true in the sermon. The words that are used narrate what God is doing in the scripture that was read, and in the lives of those who are listening. The words we use paint a picture for the hearers. It is wise to consider the words that are spoken so that the plain message is clearly communicated.

A second stylistic point to think about is the manner in which the sermon is preached. By manner I am referring to the way the preacher actually presents the sermon. Regardless of form, a preacher's manner might be one of a speaker, conversation, dramatic, reserved, or emotional, just to name a few.

It is important to note that there may be elements of each of these manners in any particular moment in the sermon, but the basis for this discussion is by what primary manner does the preacher assume. There are things that each manner can "get away with" that in another might seem awkward.

The first manner we will discuss is what I call the "Speaker/Teacher Manner." In this manner the preacher gives the sermon much like someone giving a speech or a lecture. He or she becomes the "expert" on this particular passage for the congregation for this particular day. Now the form of the sermon might be any one of them, but the way the preacher preaches carries the understanding that s/he are the speaker/teacher. If you think about the notion of the "steeple preacher" from the 1950's, this is the predominant manner that was exemplified.

The preacher having a speaker/teacher manner will ask rhetorical questions, but will mainly give information. "This is what the text says, this is what the text means, this is what you should do with it." This manner alone does not have to convey arrogance or primacy. Some of the best-known preachers today use this manner.

The second we will consider is what I call the "Conversational Manner." In a conversational manner, the preacher engages the listeners as if they are having a talk with them. This does not have to be explicitly stated – it will be felt. To understand this, let us compare it with the speaker/teacher manner. During a speech or a lecture the speaker does not ask questions that invite a spoken response. The speaker typically has a point s/he is making, or a report he or she is giving, and the speech is informational to the hearers about that topic. The speaker appears to be the "expert" on the topic they are presenting.

In a conversational manner it is quite the opposite. Now the preacher should know what s/he is talking about, but may invite the congregation into the conversation they had with the scripture in the course of the exegetical work. The preacher may ask questions that are both rhetorical and non-rhetorical. (I have actually had listeners ask questions and give answers during the sermon.) They may even engage in surveys or polls of the congregation in order to know what questions they have. In a conversational manner there is room for the congregation to "speak," created as much as possible like a "real" conversation.

The third to consider is what I call the "Dramatic Manner." In a dramatic manner, the preacher intentionally engages dramatic techniques to engage the listeners and carry the message. These techniques might include dramatic changes in the volume of their voice, dramatic pauses, dramatic gesturing, and even theatric scripture reading or dressing up and acting as a character in the passage.
Further, there maybe the use of objects or "props" to help give illustration to the sermon. Such items might include rocks, a wooden staff, fruit, a painting, a clay pot, a lantern, or a fishing pole, just to name a few. The items become central images to the main thesis of the sermon and are used in a dramatic way to help illustrate that main theme.

The fourth manner I call the "Reserved Manner." This is the opposite of the dramatic manner. In this there is still expression, but there is not the grand shifts present in a more dramatic manner. There still should be changes in voice and perhaps gesturing, but they will be more subdued. Think of an old storyteller engaging in telling a story. The story itself propels the connection with the listeners and the message. The storyteller him/herself is merely the vehicle by which the story is communicated. The same is true in the reserved manner.

By its nature, the reserved manner will more often than not appear to the listener to be more serious and perhaps solemn than the dramatic or the conversational manners. However, that does not make it, in and of itself, boring or less effective. One who I would classify as preaching in a reserved manner preached one of the most powerful Easter sermons I have ever heard.

The final manner I am classifying is what I call the "Emotional Manner." This manner intentionally and deliberately uses emotions to portray what is happening in the scripture and the main thesis of the sermon.

Now let's get this straight – the emotional manner is not about the preacher who cries at the end of every sermon, or who always yells at the congregation in the middle of it. This is close to the dramatic manner, but rather than using more devices from drama, this seeks to use the emotions present in the scripture to help preach the sermon. When the scripture talks about one being angry, then, at that point in the sermon, anger is expressed. When the scripture speaks about excitement, then the sermon illustrates. It is not simply about saying that Peter was afraid, it is about showing that emotion in the preaching moment. By displaying the emotion it can help the congregation to more clearly experience what the scripture is telling.

However, a word of warning: of the five manners here discussed, this one can be the most troublesome for the congregation. A preacher has to be very aware of what s/he is doing, and clearly demonstrate, for instance, the anger, excitement, sadness, joy, whatever, in the text rather than portraying her/himself as being that particular emotion with the congregation.

The next point for discussion in style and communication is brief, but important: the use of notes. There is no "right way" for this. Every preacher has their own system of using notes in preparation for and in delivering the sermon.

Some preachers enter the pulpit with a full manuscript printed on regular paper. Some have the paper turned sideways with two columns of manuscript. Some highlight using different colors for their own "code" to the manuscript. There are outlines, bullet lists, key phrases, and even some preachers who do not use notes at all in the preaching moment. Each of these are correct for the individual preacher.

However, there is one overarching truth for every preacher: KNOW YOUR NOTES! Regardless of what style of notes you use, if any, know them. The preaching moment can be awkward at best, and destroyed at worst by a preacher who does not know his or her notes, or
what they are going to say. Fumbling in the pulpit because one does not know what s/he has written is a recipe for disaster in the sermon. Take the time to be comfortable with whatever notes you use. They are there as an aid for the preacher in delivering the sermon – they are not the sermon itself. When you stand to preach, the sermon becomes a living, breathing moment – do not make it rely on life support!

Movements are equally important. Many of the same truths about notes can be applied here as well. Some preachers stand planted behind the pulpit, others walk around. Some remain in the chancel area, others stroll out into the congregation. The personality of the preacher helps dictate what movements will be done, but there are some considerations to think about.

First of all – if you are using notes, don’t get too far away from them. No one wants to have an unintentional awkward pause because s/he have moved too far away from their notes and must go back to retrieve them. Also, be aware of what you are feeling. Moving freely because you do so is one thing; walking around because you are too nervous to stand still is another. One can help keep the congregation’s attention – the other can make them as anxious as the preacher!

Along with movements is also gesturing. Gesturing can be as simple as raising a hand to outstretched arms, to a dramatic posture to give an illustration. On one respect, gesturing may come naturally. On the other, there needs to be some intentionality. Gesturing communicates just like the words we say. A pointed finger says something very different than an outstretched hand.

Another important consideration in the communication of the sermon is the flow of the sermon. By flow I mean how we move from one point to the next. There is some of the issue with flow that is addressed in whatever form of the sermon we use, but getting the listeners from one point to the next without losing any along the way deals directly with the flow.

Questions to consider regarding flow include:

- *How do I connect this illustration with the next point?*
- *How am I using this quote from the scripture?*
- *What is the first thing I am going to say, and how does that set up the sermon?*
- *What is the last thing I am going to say, and how does it complete the sermon?*

An old image I have heard many times illustrating the flow of a sermon is the notion of flying an airplane. There is the preparation, taxiing out to the runway, takeoff, flight, and the landing. If the pilot tries to takeoff before getting to the runway, there are problems. If the pilot fails to land in time, the plane will crash. The clearer the takeoff, the better the flight. The smoother the landing is, the more enjoyable the flight is remembered. There are many other illustrations we can gather from this image, but I think you get the general idea.

All of these points about the pilot and flying are true for the sermon as well. The preacher has been reading over the passage and studying in preparation for the sermon for a
while (we hope) The congregation is hearing this for the first time. The preacher can't already be airborne before he or she gets the passengers on the plane.

Consider what it is you feel called to proclaim. How do you get to that point? Does the sermon flow logically? Are there great jumps with no connecting. I was at a community Thanksgiving service one time where the preacher was talking about the pilgrims and the help they got from the Native Americans and the next thing I knew he was talking about a chicken he saw down in Louisiana. I did not drift off to sleep or let my mind wander – I promise! He made a jump Evil Knievel could not have made! Needless to say, I was not the only listener lost. The sad part – he never got us back. He was flying – we were all still waiting at the terminal.

Thinking about not only what you are going to say and how you are going to say it, but also how you are going to move through the sermon will be greatly rewarded by the congregation who hears you. Simply stringing together a series of points without connecting them does not make a good sermon.

The final notions to consider in style and communication are habits. Habits are things we bring with us into the pulpit that we may or may not be aware of, as well as good practices to always keep in mind to do. Such habits include clear speech, avoiding distractions, body language, and appropriate dress.

The first habit to think about is clear speech. If someone can't hear or understand what you are saying, it really does not matter how good is your sermon. Some good notions for clear speech are:

• Clear your throat as needed, but no more than is needed.

• Avoid vocal pauses such as "um," and "ah."

• Don't run words together. Not only is it hard to understand what is being said, but someone might hear something you did not say. Consider running the following phrases together: "Jack asked me..." or "Jesus not going..."

• Project your voice. This can be difficult for preachers who are naturally soft-spoken. A microphone can help, but clear projection is still the responsibility of the one talking.

• Don’t speak too quickly or rapidly.

The second habits to consider are distractions. These are more often than not unconscious traits each preacher has. This is a really good reason to watch a recording of yourself preaching to see what you are doing of which you may not be aware. Such distractions include:

• Jingling stuff in your pockets.

• Propping on the pulpit.

• Wringing hands.
Scratching where it itches.

Fiddling with your hair or jewelry.

These distractions can be irritating to watch and take away from what is being said. It is best to become aware of them and practice avoiding them.

Body language is a third consideration for style and communication. Movements and gesturing can fall under this category, but it is more than just those two points. Body language also includes facial expressions, eye contact, and posture.

Much of our communication is carried out in non-verbal ways. The expression on someone's face tells more sometimes than the words they are saying. All of us at one time or another have asked a friend "How are you?" to which they replied "Fine," but we knew by not only the way they said it but how they looked at us that they were not.

We are going to make facial expressions. They occur naturally without out thought most of the time. But we need to be intentional in sermons to make sure our faces say the same thing our words are. For example, it does not carry the same message if one is preaching on how happy God is when someone accepts God's offer of grace if they have a frown on their face. If one is preaching about the pain and agony Mary the Blessed Mother must have experienced seeing her son crucified it would probably carry more impact if the preacher was not smiling.

Further, giving appropriate eye contact with the congregation connects the preacher with the congregation and the congregation with the sermon. Failure to do so will inevitably cause a disconnection for the listeners of the sermon. Make sure to look at congregates in the eyes, or at least give the appearance where this is impossible, so that they are connected with you in the preaching moment.

Finally there is posture. Slouching because of an injury or physical issue is one thing. Slouching and propping unintentionally is quite another. Good speaking requires good posture. Avoid propping on the pulpit, leaning on the chancel railing, and gripping the pulpit like you are hanging on for dear life (even if you are!) These convey messages to the congregation that they will hear as loudly as the words you are saying. If it appears you are not taking the sermon seriously, why should they? If you appear to be scared to death, they will be scared for you. All of these issues are conveyed in the posture we assume for the sermon, and can distract a congregation beyond being able to hear anything that the preacher is proclaiming.

The last style and communication issue to address is that of appropriate dress and appearance. Now I know there are varied opinions about what a preacher should and should not wear. I am not advocating for a three-piece suit to go with your three-point sermon. But I am saying that the dress of the preacher should not be a distraction.

First of all the preacher's dress should fit the style of the service and the culture of the congregation. A preacher serving in a formal liturgical service should not be in jeans and a t-shirt. Likewise, if a preacher is serving in a contemporary service, a suit or dress may not connect well with the listeners.
Along with dress there are some basic guidelines. No matter the gender of the preacher, pants that are too tight should not be worn. Ladies should avoid plunging necklines. Gentlemen should really avoid having the top three buttons on their shirt undone. Like pants, shirts should not be too tight. All of these are out of respect for your congregation, and, most of all, for the preaching moment.

There are also hygiene issues to consider. Nails should be trimmed and clean. As a general rule no one wants to receive the Holy Sacrament of Communion from dirty hands. Make sure open cuts are bandaged. If you are wearing nail polish, make sure it is not flaking. When you cough, turn your head or cough into your arm. Try not to be sniffing when administering the Sacraments or preaching. If you are sick, then take the Sunday off. These things might seem trivial or absurd, but I promise your congregation notices. They can make a negative impact on what is being done.

These are simply some considerations for style and communication. Remember, communication is the whole package – not simply what is being said. We must be aware of how we are communicating the sermon in every aspect that we can. Many times what makes the difference between a "good" sermon and a "bad" sermon is not exegesis or knowledge, but the style and communication of the sermon itself.
Chapter 7

Preaching Special Services

In the life of any congregation there will be special times of worship. Such special services can include weddings, funerals, special liturgical days, church celebrations and emphases, and civil holidays. Many times on these days there will be a perceived need to limit the sermon. Perhaps it comes from time restraints, family wishes, or special celebrations in the congregation. Where we as preachers must be sensitive to the issues of time and culture, we must also be the ones to remind the worshippers why we are gathering in the first place.

Weddings are some of the most beautiful celebrations in the life of the church. It is in these services where two persons come to be joined in marriage. They take holy vows to God and to each other to live under the covenant of marriage.

But these services can also become more about the dress, the flowers, the food, the bridal party, the families, and all the other trimmings and trappings that it becomes easy to forget that first and foremost this is a solemn time of worship and hearing God speak.

A sermon for a wedding needs not be as long as a regular sermon, but I do believe their needs to be a sermon. A reflection on what scripture says about what is taking place by the one administering the vows is a powerful testimony. So often we can move through the scriptural passages in the liturgy that they hardly have time to speak. By taking a few minutes to draw intentionally to the scripture helps establish what is truly being done. Remember, even in a wedding, God is the center of worship.

When preaching a wedding sermon try to make it personal for the ones getting married, without making it a speech about them dipped in scripture. Address what the scriptures say about love, cleaving, relationship, or promises. This can be done in a few minutes, to whatever time is allowed for it. This is not the time to preach about those in the congregation that do not yet know the Lord, or to preach on how marriage has been disavowed by society. It is a reverent occasion where the preacher is proclaiming what God says about this moment, and in the vows here being made.

Another special celebration in the life of the congregation is that of funerals. There is no greater service a church can provide for a family than to help them say goodbye and remember the promises Jesus has made to us. In the United Methodist tradition, we do not call them funerals. Rather they are "The Celebration of the Life
of...” It is an important distinction. We are not simply gathering to mom, but also to
rejoice.

Dr. Tom Long used to say in the preaching classes I took with him, "Remember,
when you stand in the pulpit to preach at a funeral, you are not standing alone. Death is
there with you, behind you, whispering to you and to those gathered 'See, I've won.' You,
as the preacher, are the only one there who can stand against Death. You proclaim not
simply about the life the person lived, but the life they now live. You proclaim that Death
has not won."

As with a wedding, but usually not quite as bad, people can forget why we are
gathering. It is important that the funeral sermon address the life of the one who has
passed, but also proclaims the gospel message. Again, this is not the place to speak to
those listening who "Do not yet know our Lord.” There is a place for that sermon, but
not at the funeral. Preach the truth of the gospel and allow the Holy Spirit to work on
each as they will allow.

There can be many issues for a sermon preached at a funeral. Sometimes the
events surrounding the passing are peaceful; sometimes they are very traumatic.
Sometimes the person who has passed was a devout Christian; other times, not so much.
The sermon must preach the truth with love and respect about the message of the gospel
on the life of the one we are celebrating. Do not tell how they loved coming to church if
they never came. Do not speak about how involved they were in the family if they were
not. The family knows the truth about the one who has died. What they need to hear is
what God has to say about it. Proclaim God's grace, God's presence, God's mercy, and
God's promise. Leave the judgment to God, while being truthful about the life before
you.

Ligurical celebrations also require a special sermon. By liturgical celebrations, I
am referring to celebrations that are a part of the Christian calendar. Such celebrations
include the Hanging of the Green at the beginning of Advent, Christmas Eve, Ash
Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, World Communion
Sunday, and All Saints Sunday, just to name a few.

On these celebrations time can still be a factor. Sometimes the special liturgies
can take up more time in the worship service than usual. Sometimes folks are in a hurry.
Whatever it is make sure to plan appropriate time for the sermon.

Also on these celebrations, be sure to preach to the occasion. For example, when
I was in music ministry, I was on staff with a senior pastor who used the Advent and
Christmas seasons to preach on spiritual gifts. He was shocked when the congregation
did not respond well to his sermons. He thought they had all heard the Christmas story
before -let's do something different. To be blunt, he was wrong!
The celebration of the seasons gives a rhythm to the life of the congregation. Remembering and rejoicing about Christmas, Easter, and the like are important for the growing of disciples. Also, never take for granted that everyone in the congregation on Christmas Eve, for example, knows the Christmas story. Are you sure there is no one there that has yet to believe? These celebrations should contain a sermon that gives definition to why we celebrate, and proclaims what God has, is, and will do as a result – as scripture allows.

Along with liturgical celebrations, there are also denominational and local congregation celebrations. Such celebrations might include Boy Scout Sunday, Girl Scout Sunday, Disability Awareness, Organ Donor Sunday, Aldersgate Sunday, and many more. As with the liturgical celebrations, be sure to preach to the Sunday you are celebrating. But also be sure to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ – not the gospel of scouting. These celebrations give great emphasis to missions and ministries of the congregation. But remember to proclaim why we do them rather than the glory of them themselves.

The final special celebrations that I want to discuss are civil holidays. These holidays include Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, New Year's, and Flag Day, just to name a few. What days are celebrated, and how they are celebrated really becomes an issue of the individual cultures of the congregation. But just remember – the sermon is about proclaiming God's word to God's people. These celebrations can be important – but we gather to worship God. Be sure that on the Fourth of July, for example, God is worshipped in God's proper place. The sermon can speak to these days, but only from the standpoint of scripture.

These are just some basics to consider when preaching special celebrations. Each preacher develops his or her own way of navigating the issues that arise with these celebrations. But each preacher must also remember to what he or she is called – proclaiming the word of God to the people of God. Make sure the sermon fits the celebration, but also make sure it is from God.
Chapter 8

Resources and References

In this chapter I would like to introduce you to things to consider when choosing resources to aid in scriptural exegesis and sermon preparation. I will also include a listing of some resources that I have found most helpful. This listing is not complete, and there are new opportunities constantly being developed and published. To take some time in considering what resources to use and how to use them will be time well spent.

Dictionaries:

The first resources I want to discuss are bible dictionaries. Bible dictionaries do more than simply define words. They can also be a guide in understanding a cultural aspect of a passage, as well as explain events, such as festivals, celebrations, and worship rituals. They can also provide information about church history, the development of the books found in the Bible, and overview of key themes.

A good biblical dictionary will be one produced by an editorial board and published by a known and respected publisher. Some of my favorite are:

- *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* published by Abingdon Press. This is a five-volume set. It gives great information about definitions, cultural context, and understandings. It is written by a team of biblical scholars from some of the most respected seminaries in the United States. The volumes may be purchased individually, or as the complete set.

- *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* published by Doubleday Press. This is a six-volume set that deals with definitions, origins, and contextual understanding. It is written by a team of biblical scholars from prestigious seminaries. The volumes may be purchased separately, or as the complete set.

- *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. This is a one-volume dictionary that is not as exhaustive as the *New Interpreter’s Dictionary* or *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, but still gives great references as well as providing illustrations of many of the items and locations therein defined. It is published by Holman Bible Publishers.

- *The Oxford Dictionary of Church History*. This dictionary helps to define and explain terms, rituals, customs, and belief practices in the history of the Christian church. It is great reference for understanding things pertaining to the history, life, and practices of the Church, both ancient and modern. It is published by Oxford Press.

- *A Dictionary of Early Christian Biography*. This dictionary is really not a "dictionary" in the traditional sense. Rather it is an annotated biography of some of the people we learn about in the pages of scripture. It helps to tell us a little
about some of the characters we meet in the stories. It is edited by Henry Wace
and William Piercy, and published by Hendrickson Publishers.

- *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs.* Like *A Dictionary of Early Christian
  Biography,* this dictionary is really not a "dictionary" in the traditional sense. It
helps to define some of the beliefs of the early church, and how we developed our
own theological understandings. It is edited by David Berest, and published by
Hendrickson Publishers.

Concordances:

Another great reference is a concordance. A concordance can be helpful for finding
where a passage is located in the Bible, but it can do so much more. It can show you all the
places where a particular word is used in the Bible. It can help you see how a word is used. It
can tell you how many times a word is used. There are many helpful things a concordance can
provide.

As far as which concordance, in my opinion there is no better one for the money than
*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.* Now today, many titles of this include "The
Strongest Strong's..." but they are simply updated and expanded editions. Be careful – *Strong's*
"keys" (words) their concordances for a particular translation. For example there is the *Strong's
Concordance* keyed for the King James Version, the New American Standard, and the New
International Version. Be sure the one you get and/or are using matches the translation of the
scripture you are studying. In the KJV, 1 Corinthians 13 begins with *Though I speak in the
tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity...* while in the NIV it reads *If I speak in
the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love...* Knowing what word to search for –
either "charity" or "love" - will make a big difference in your concordance work.

Pronunciation Guides:

A handy little reference to have is one that will help with how you pronounce some of
those hard words and names in the Bible. A great tool is *The Harper-Collins Bible
Pronunciation Guide.* William Walker, Jr. is the General Editor, and it is published by
HarperSanFrancisco Publishers.

Maps, Charts, and Reconstructions:

A good book of maps can also be very useful in understanding locations, directions of
movements, and journeys told in the scriptures. A good resource for this is the *Holman Book of
Biblical Charts, Maps, and Reconstructions.* Not only does this book provide easy-to-read maps,
but they also list very helpful charts that display various themes, such as parallel scriptures,
theological issues, and measurements, just to name a few. It also has full-color reconstructions
of such things as the temples, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Tabernacle, just to name a few.
This is a great aid, not only in sermon preparation, but also in teaching Bible studies and
Christian Education classes. Marsha Smith is its General Editor, and Broadman and Holman
Publishers publish it.
Gospel Parallels:

Gospel parallels show on one spread a particular passage as it is recorded in multiple gospels. This way you can see on one page how Matthew and Luke record what we call the Beatitudes. What is the same? What is changed? What is removed? All of these questions can help bring a passage into deeper conversation with the preacher. Also, by process of elimination, you can also see what is unique to each gospel. A very good gospel parallel is *Gospel Parallels* edited by Burton Throckmorton, Jr. published by Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Commentaries:

This brings us to the final resource that I am discussing. Commentaries are a wealth of knowledge, and an indispensable aid in exegetical work. There are a great number of commentaries out there, and they are not all created equal. There is some helpful advice to consider when deciding what commentaries to search and/or purchase.

The first thing I consider when choosing a commentary is what is the commentary’s purpose. Some are written as scholarly research on the scriptures. Others are used for illustrations and stories. Others still come from a specific theological position. All of these are helpful and very useful, but one needs to understand where a particular commentary is coming from before approaching it.

Another consideration is commentary sets verses individual books. Do not be so quick to not consider individual commentaries in favor of sets. There are some really great resources in individual books that are just as helpful as a volume in a set.

Still another consideration is how the commentary was written. Was it written with an editorial board? Does it come from proven scholarship? Does the authors of the commentary have any credentials to lend themselves as capable of writing a commentary? When searching the world-wide web one can find many articles written about passages of scripture. Be careful when considering them to make sure they are "speaking the truth" and not just ramblings by someone thinking s/he has something to say.

Here are some of the commentaries that I find very useful. I will give a brief explanation of each simply to be used as a guide. These are not scholarly reviews of each. Search some out and see for yourself what works for you.

- *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary.* (abbreviation: NIB). This set consists of twelve volumes and an index. It is written from the position of biblical scholarship by some of the Church’s best scholars. The volumes can be purchased individually, or as a set. They are published by Abingdon Press.

- *The New Interpreter's Bible One-volume Commentary.* This is the same scholarship of the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* set, just reduced into one volume. It does not go as in-depth as the set, obviously, but gives some wonderful insight. It is published by Abingdon Press.

- *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.* This commentary set is written by a number of renown biblical scholars and preachers.
It is written from the perspective as preaching exegetical work. The volumes can be purchased individually, or as a set. As of now, the commentary consists of forty-three volumes. It is published by Westminster John Knox Press.

- *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*/*The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. (abbreviation: NICOT/NICNT). This is another scholarly commentary set. Not every book is covered, yet, as they are continually adding to it. Currently, there are forty-one volumes to this set. They can be purchased individually, or as the current set. They are published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

- *Parables for Preachers.* This commentary set looks specifically at the parables presented in the Revised Common Lectionary. The set consists of three volumes—one for each cycle year of the Lectionary. It is written by Barbara E. Reid, and published by The Liturgical Press.

- *Feasting on the Word.* This is a commentary that specifically looks at all of the scripture passages of the Revised Common Lectionary. The commentary is divided into the three Lectionary years, A, B, and C. Each year consists of four volumes dedicated to a cycle: Volume 1 contains the Advent and Christmas cycle. Volume 2 contains the Lent through Eastertide cycle. Volume 3 contains Ordinary Time, part 1. Volume 4 contains Ordinary Time, part 2. The commentary is edited by David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor. They are published by Westminster John Knox Press. The commentaries can be purchased individually, or as a complete set.


- *The Women's Bible Commentary.* This is a one-volume individual commentary that looks at scripture from a feminist perspective. This can be very helpful in seeing scripture from a different perspective, whether male or female, as it comes from a feminist theological position. It is edited by Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, and is published by Westminster John Knox Press.

These are just some considerations and examples of commentaries, as well as other resources and references. For a preacher, the best resources are other preachers. Listen to other sermons, talk with gifted preachers, and develop relationships with the preachers in your area. Get together to discuss a sermon series plan, a passage of scripture from the lectionary, and to critique each other's sermons. The resources here mentioned are very useful books, but they do not replace living conversation. Such resources are invaluable to continue to develop one's preaching skills, just as these books are an invaluable resource to sermon preparation and exegesis.
Conclusion

I have written this book to be a practical guide for those who are starting out, as well as perhaps a reminder to those who have been preaching for a season. This is not the ending of what needs to be learned and developed becoming a "good" preacher. It is important to remember that preaching is not a science; rather, it is an art. Like any art form, understanding the basics and practicing is a must for mastery. May your journey be full of glorious experiences in proclaiming the word of God to the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.
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ii The scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

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iv 1 Tim. 4:7b
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vi 1 Tim. 4:12
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