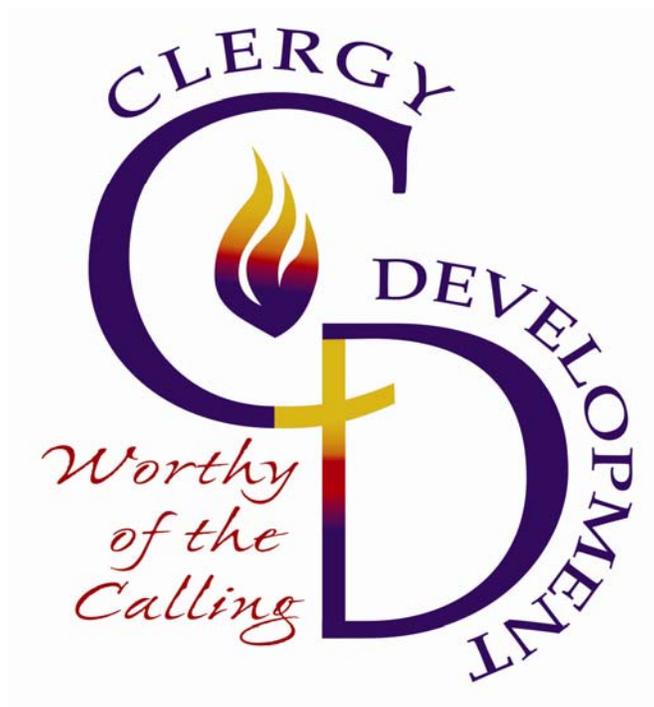

Student Guide

Preaching the Story of God



Clergy Development
Church of the Nazarene
Kansas City, Missouri
816-333-7000 ext. 2468; 800-306-7651 (USA)
2002

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The **Modular Course of Study** is an outcome-based curriculum designed to implement the educational paradigm defined by the Breckenridge Consultations. Clergy Development is responsible for maintaining and distributing the Modular Course of Study for the Church of the Nazarene.

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Series Foreword

A Vision for Christian Ministry: Clergy Education in the Church of the Nazarene

The chief purpose of all persons—indeed, all of the creation—is to worship, love, and serve God. God has made himself known in His deeds of creation and redemption. As the Redeemer, God has called into existence a people: the Church, who embody, celebrate, and declare His name and His ways. The life of God with His people and the world constitutes the Story of God. That story is recorded principally in the Old and New Testaments, and continues to be told by the resurrected Christ who lives and reigns as Head of His Church. The Church lives to declare the whole Story of God. This it does in many ways—in the lives of its members who are even now being transformed by Christ through preaching, the sacraments, in oral testimony, community life, and in mission. All members of the Body of Christ are called to exercise a ministry of witness and service. No one is excluded.

In God's own wisdom He calls some persons to fulfill the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and caring for God's people, in a form referred to as the ordained ministry. God is the initial actor in this call, not humans. In the Church of the Nazarene we believe God calls and persons respond. They do not elect the Christian ministry. All persons whom God calls to the ordained ministry should continue to be amazed that He would call them. They should continue to be humbled by God's call. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states, "we recognize and hold that the Head of the Church calls some men and women to the more official and public work of the ministry." It adds, "The church, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, will recognize the Lord's call" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 400).

An ordained Christian minister has as his or her chief responsibility to declare in many ways the whole Story of God as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. His or her charge is to "tend the flock of God . . . not under compulsion, but willingly, not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3, NRSV). The minister fulfills this charge under the supervision of Christ, the chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4). Such ministry can be fulfilled only after a period of careful preparation. Indeed, given the ever-changing demands placed upon the minister, "preparation" never ceases.

A person who enters the Christian ministry becomes in a distinct sense a steward of the gospel of God (Titus 1:7). A steward is one who is entrusted to care for what belongs to another. A steward may be one who takes care of another person or who manages the property of someone else. All Christians are stewards of the grace of God. But in addition, in a peculiar sense a Christian minister is a steward of the "mystery of God," which is Christ, the Redeemer, the Messiah of God. In all faithfulness, the minister is called to "make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19, NRSV). Like Paul, he or she must faithfully preach "the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:8-10, NRSV).

In fulfilling this commission, there is plenty of room for diligence and alertness, but no room for laziness or privilege (Titus 1:5-9). Good stewards recognize that they are

stewards only, not the owners, and that they will give an account of their stewardship to the master. Faithfulness to one's charge and to the Lord who issued it is the steward's principal passion. When properly understood, the Christian ministry should never be thought of as a "job." It is ministry—uniquely Christian ministry. No higher responsibility or joy can be known than to become a steward of the Story of God in Christ's Church. The person who embraces God's call to the ordained ministry will stand in the company of the apostles, the Early Fathers of the Church, the Reformers of the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformers, and many persons around the world today who joyfully serve as stewards of the gospel of God.

Obviously, one who does not recognize, or who understands but rejects, just how complete and inclusive a minister's stewardship must be, should not start down the path that leads to ordination. In a peculiar sense, a Christian minister must in all respects model the gospel of God. He or she is to "shun" the love of money. Instead, the minister must "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness." He or she must "fight the good fight of the faith" and "take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called" (1 Tim 6: 11-12, NRSV).

Hence, the Church of the Nazarene believes "the minister of Christ is to be in all things a pattern to the flock—in punctuality, discretion, diligence, earnestness; 'in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left' (2 Cor 6: 6-7)" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 401.1). The minister of Christ "must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, ⁸but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, ⁹holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching . . . able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1: 7-9, NASB).

In order to be a good steward of God's Story one must, among other things, give oneself to careful and systematic study, both before and after ordination. This will occur not because he or she is forced to do so, but out of a love for God and His people, the world He is working to redeem, and out of an inescapable sense of responsibility. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the attitude one brings to preparation for the ministry reveals much about what he or she thinks of God, the gospel, and Christ's Church. The God who became incarnate in Jesus and who made a way of salvation for all gave His very best in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. In order to be a good steward, a Christian minister must respond in kind. Jesus told numerous parables about stewards who did not recognize the importance of what had been entrusted to them (Mt 21: 33-44; 25: 14-30; Mk 13: 34-37; Lk 12: 35-40; 19: 11-27; 20: 9-18).

Preparation for ministry in Christ's Church—one's education in all its dimensions—should be pursued in full light of the responsibility before God and His people that the ministry involves. This requires that one take advantage of the best educational resources at his or her disposal.

The Church of the Nazarene recognizes how large is the responsibility associated with the ordained Christian ministry and accepts it fully. Part of the way we recognize our responsibility before God is seen in the requirements we make for ordination and the practice of ministry. We believe the call to and practice of Christian ministry is a gift, not a right or privilege. We believe God holds a minister to the highest of religious, moral, personal, and professional standards. We are not reluctant to expect those

standards to be observed from the time of one's call until his or her death. We believe Christian ministry should first be a form of worship. The practice of ministry is both an offering to God and a service to His Church. By the miracle of grace, the work of the ministry can become a means of grace for God's people (Rom 12: 1-3). One's education for ministry is also a form of worship.

The modules comprising the Course of Study that may lead a person to candidacy for ordination have been carefully designed to prepare one for the kind of ministry we have described. Their common purpose is to provide a holistic preparation for entrance into the ordained Christian ministry. They reflect the Church's wisdom, experience, and responsibility before God. The modules show how highly the Church of the Nazarene regards the gospel, the people of God, the world for which Christ gave His life, and Christian ministry. Completing the modules will normally take three or four years. But no one should feel pressured to meet this schedule.

The careful study for which the modules call should show that before God and His Church one accepts the stewardly responsibility associated with ordained ministry.

Acknowledgments

Every module is the accumulation of effort by many people. Someone writes the original manuscript, others offer suggestions to strengthen the content and make the material more easily understood, and finally an editor formats the module for publication. This module is no different. Many people have contributed to this module. Every effort has been made to represent accurately the original intent of the principal contributors.

Principal Contributor

The principal contributor for this module is Dan Boone, the current pastor of College Church of the Nazarene, Bourbonnais, IL USA. Dr. Boone also serves as adjunct professor at Olivet Nazarene University and Nazarene Theological Seminary. He holds a D.Min. from McCormick Theological Seminary, an M.Div. from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and a B.A. from Trevecca Nazarene University. The following acknowledgments are his.

Many people have contributed to this manual. I wish to express my appreciation to the following:

- Algie and Ruth Boone, my parents, who shaped me by the stories of grace around a family altar.
- Rev. Fred Sartin, who mentored me as a young preacher. He took me with him as he supplied pulpits across the state of Mississippi. At the age of 14, he had me in front of small congregations preaching the good news of Jesus. The discussions in his car on the way home from those services may have been the best seminary education I received.
- I am the product of many teachers. I owe deep indebtedness to H. Ray Dunning, Mildred Wynkoop, William Greathouse, Willard Taylor, Charles Isbel, Dee Freeborn, and Don Wardlaw. In addition to these I am thankful for the teaching faculties of Trevecca Nazarene University, Nazarene Theological Seminary, and McCormick Theological Seminary.
- And the writers . . . aaah, the writers. Fred Craddock, Thomas Long, Barbara Brown Taylor, Fredrick Buechner, Paul Scott Wilson, Henri Nouwen, Bob Benson, Reuben Welch, Kathleen Norris, Garrison Keillor, Henry Mitchell, Eugene Lowery. These have been my friends.
- But preaching ultimately resides in the congregation. I am indebted to the good people of Nazarene churches in McComb, MS; New Salem, MS; Nashville, TN; Overland Park, KS; Raleigh, NC; and Bourbonnais, IL. In retrospect, they shaped me more than I them.
- My most honest critics of preaching have been my family. Denise, my wife of 28 years, has lived on a steady diet of my sermons. God bless her! She has improved many of them by her life. She is my best friend. Our three daughters had one pastor for most of their life. They are my deepest delight. They are one big reason I have worked so hard to preach well. Hopefully, the imprint of the gospel is indelible.
- These acknowledgments run deeper than personal gratitude. They are a way of saying the author of this teaching manual is a person formed by the community of Jesus. It is my hope this curriculum will empower future preachers of the great holiness message of the Church of the Nazarene and the people of God around the world.

Responder

Each module was reviewed by at least one content specialist to ensure that the content did not represent a single, narrow view or opinion. The responder provided suggestions the principal contributor could integrate into this module.

David Busic was the responder for this module. Rev. Busic currently serves as senior pastor at Central Church of the Nazarene in Lenexa, KS. Rev. Busic serves as part-time professor of Preaching at Nazarene Theological Seminary. He is also a co-editor and frequent contributor to *The Preacher's Magazine* (www.preachersmagazine.org), a publication of Clergy Development provided by Nazarene Publishing House.

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Syllabus

Preaching the Story of God

Educational Institution, Setting or Educational Provider:

Location of the Course:

Course Dates:

Name of the Instructor:

Instructor's Address, Telephone, and E-mail Address:

Rationale

This module serves to train the student in one of the most important tasks of pastoral ministry, the preaching of the Word of God. This task is considered foundational to fulfilling the calling of God to the ordained ministry. The Apostle Paul illustrated the importance of proclamation in his charge to Timothy: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim 4:2).

This module addresses the need for preparation of the preacher as a necessary prerequisite to the preparation and delivery of the sermon, so both the preacher and the spoken message will have authority. This module will equip the student to go through the process of sermon construction from a hermeneutical study of the biblical text, through the stages of development, until the sermon is ready to be delivered. Attention will be given to the preaching event as the oral culmination of the sermon process, including the call for a decision. In addition, the module will aid the student in understanding the need for planning a preaching program that addresses the needs of the congregation and aids in the overall worship experience of the people of God. The skills developed from this module will also help the minister to be an effective teacher of the Bible to the church.

For maximum benefit, this module should be taken after the student has completed modules in Introduction to Christian Ministry, Oral and Written Communication, Old Testament, New Testament, and Biblical Hermeneutics, since a working knowledge in these areas will be assumed in the instruction.

Much of this module makes the assumption that the student will understand basic exegetical and interpretive issues regarding a text. This is as it should be. If the student has not had that foundation, much of what he or she is taught will be more difficult to grasp. It is crucial that the student has taken Biblical Hermeneutics before taking this class.

Educational Assumptions

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to any process of Christian education at any level. We will consistently request and expect the Spirit's presence within and among us.
2. Christian teaching and learning is best done in the context of community (people being and working together). Community is the gift of the Spirit but may be enhanced or hindered by human effort. Communities have common values, stories, practices, and goals. Explicit effort will be invested to enhance community within the class. Group work will take place in every lesson.
3. Every adult student has knowledge and experiences to contribute to the class. We learn not only from the instructor and the reading assignments, but also from each other. Each student is valued not only as a learner but also as a teacher. That is one reason so many exercises in this course are cooperative and collaborative in nature.
4. Journaling is an ideal way to bring theory and practice together as students synthesize the principles and content of the lessons with their own experiences, preferences, and ideas.

Outcome Statements

This module contributes to the development of the following abilities as defined in the *U.S. Sourcebook for Ministerial Development*.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- CN16 Ability to identify the steps of historical literary, and theological analysis used in exegesis
- CN17 Ability to exegete a passage of Scripture using the steps listed above
- CP1 Ability to communicate publicly through multiple methods (oral, written, media, etc.) with clarity and creativity for the sake of fostering meaning
- CP2 Ability to write clearly and in grammatically correct manner in the modes of discourse used in the ministry
- CP3 Ability to speak coherently and cogently in the modes of discourse appropriate for the various ministry contexts
- CP22 (Elder) Ability to prepare, organize, and deliver biblically sound sermons using appropriate techniques and skills in culturally appropriate ways
- CP24 (Elder) Ability to assess the strengths and weaknesses of current homiletical models in light of enduring theological (Bible, doctrine, philosophy) and contextual (history, psychology, sociological) perspectives
- CP21 Ability to envision, order, participate, and lead in contextualized theologically grounded worship
- CP15 Ability to think globally and engage cross-culturally for the purpose of mission
- CP16 Ability to communicate evangelistically and to be engaged with and equip others in personal and congregational evangelism
- CX1 Ability to discover sociological dynamics and trends and to apply that information to specific ministry settings
- CX2 Ability to analyze and describe congregations and communities
- CX4 Ability to explain the operational culture
- CX9 Ability to apply historical analysis to the life of a local congregation in order to describe its historical and cultural context

Additional intended learning outcomes are:

- The ability to organize, prepare, and deliver biblically valid sermons using skills and techniques in culturally appropriate ways
- The ability to identify and select the most appropriate approach to developing a preaching text, such as narrative, inductive, deductive, or other sermon forms
- The ability to preach with cultural and spiritual sensitivity in order to address the needs of the audience
- The ability to prepare and consistently preach sermons which effectively call listeners to new life in Christ and to entire sanctification
- The ability to appropriately express pastoral care and a call to discipleship through a balanced and thoughtful preaching plan
- The ability to incorporate the sermon into the planning of the entire worship program
- The ability to be sensitive to the verbal and non-verbal responses that are part of the two-way process of effective communication
- The ability to process and integrate the behavioral and character implications of the truth of the sermon into the life of the preacher

Recommended Reading

Course Requirements

- 1. Class attendance, attention, and participation** are especially important. Students are responsible for **all** assignments and in-class work. Much of the work in this course is small-group work. Cooperative, small-group work cannot be made up. That makes attendance imperative. Even if one does extra reading or writing, the values of discussion, dialogue, and learning from each other are thwarted. If one lesson is missed, the instructor will require extra work before completion can be acknowledged. If two or more classes are missed, the student will be required to repeat the whole module.

- 2. Assignments**

Journaling: The only ongoing assignment for this module is your journal. It is to be used regularly, if not daily. On at least one occasion during the term, the instructor will check the journals. In each lesson a journal assignment is included.

The journal should become the student's friend and treasury of insights, devotions, and ideas. Here the integration of theory and practice occurs. The spiritual life nature of the journal helps guard against the course of study being merely academic as you are repeatedly called upon to apply the principles studied to your own heart and your own ministry situation.

This journal is not a diary, not a catchall. It is, rather, a guided journal or a focused journal in which the educational experience and its implications are selected for reflection and writing.

The framers of this curriculum are concerned about the way that students fall into learning “about” the Bible, or “about” the spiritual life rather than learning—that is coming to know and internalize the Bible and spiritual principles. The journaling experience ensures that the “Be” component of “Be, Know, and Do” is present in the course of study. Be faithful with all journaling assignments.

Daily Work: This module has regular homework assignments. It is called daily work because even though the class may only meet once a week, the student should be working on the module on a “daily” basis. Sometimes the homework assignments are quite heavy. The assignments are important. Even if homework is not discussed in class every session, the work is to be handed in. This gives the instructor regular information about the student’s progress in the course. The normal time for homework to be handed in is at the beginning of each class session. **All** assignments are to be completed.

Sermon: The last assignment for this module will be the presentation of a 15- to 20-minute sermon. The lessons leading up to that assignment will guide the student in the preparation for his or her sermon.

Course Outline and Schedule

The class will meet for a minimum of 18 hours according to the following schedule:

Session Date	Session Time	
		1. Introduction to Preaching
		2. Listening to Scripture
		3. Asking Questions of the Scripture Text
		4. Looking for Trouble
		5. Working with Images, Incidents, and Issues
		6. Pausing to Let the Text Speak to Me
		7. Consulting the Scholars
		8. Exegeting the Congregation
		9. Selecting the Form of the Sermon
		10. Analyzing Sermon Form
		11. Writing the Sermon and Preparing to Preach
		12. The Place of the Sermon in Worship
		13. Preaching
		14. Preaching (optional)
		15. Preaching (optional)

Course Evaluation

The instructor, the course itself, and the student's progress will be evaluated. These evaluations will be made in several ways.

The progress of students will be evaluated with an eye for enhancing the learning experience by:

1. Carefully observing the small-group work, noting the competence of reports, the balance of discussion, the quality of the relationships, the cooperation level, and the achievement of assigned tasks
2. Careful reading of homework assignments
3. Completion of all homework assignments
4. Journal checks

The course materials and the teacher will be evaluated by frequently asking and discussing the effectiveness and relevance of a certain method, experience, story, lecture, or other activity.

Some evaluation cannot be made during the class itself. Some objectives will not be measurable for years to come. If students encounter the transforming power of God at deeper levels than ever before, learn devotional skills and practice them with discipline, and incorporate the best of this course into their own ministries, the fruit of this educational endeavor could go on for a long time. In truth, that is what we expect.

Additional Information

A reasonable effort to assist every student will be made. Any student who has handicaps, learning disabilities, or other conditions that make the achievement of the class requirements exceedingly difficult should make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to see what special arrangements can be made. Any student who is having trouble understanding the assignments, lectures, or other learning activities should talk to the instructor to see what can be done to help.

Instructor's Availability

Good faith efforts to serve the students both in and beyond the classroom will be made.

Journaling: A Tool for Personal Reflection and Integration

Participating in the Course of Study is the heart of your preparation for ministry. To complete each module you will be required to listen to lectures, read books and articles, participate in discussions, and write papers. Content mastery is the goal.

An equally important part of ministerial preparation is spiritual formation. Some might choose to call spiritual formation devotions, while others might refer to it as growth in grace. Whichever title you place on the process, it is the intentional cultivation of your relationship with God. The module work will be helpful in adding to your knowledge, your skills, and your ability to do ministry. The spiritual formation work will weave all you learn into the fabric of your being, allowing your education to flow freely from your head through your heart to those you serve.

Although there are many spiritual disciplines to help you cultivate your relationship with God, journaling is the critical skill that ties them all together. Journaling simply means keeping a record of your experiences and the insights you have gained along the way. It is a discipline because it does require a good deal of work faithfully to spend daily time in your journal. Many people confess this is a practice they tend to push aside when pressed by their many other responsibilities. Even five minutes a day spent journaling can make a major difference in your education and your spiritual development. Let me explain.

Consider journaling time spent with your best friend. Onto the pages of a journal you will pour out your candid responses to the events of the day, the insights you gained from class, a quote gleaned from a book, and an 'ah-ha' that came to you as two ideas connected. This is not the same as keeping a diary, since a diary seems to be a chronicle of events without the personal dialogue. The journal is the repository for all of your thoughts, reactions, prayers, insights, visions, and plans. Though some people like to keep complex journals with sections for each type of reflection, others find a simple running commentary more helpful. In either case, record the date and the location at the beginning of every journal entry. It will help you when it comes time to review your thoughts.

It is important to chat briefly about the logistics of journaling. All you will need is a pen and paper to begin. Some folks prefer loose-leaf paper that can be placed in a three-ring binder, others like spiral-bound notebooks, while others enjoy using composition books. Whichever style you choose, it is important to develop a pattern that works for you.

Establishing a time and a place for writing in your journal is essential. If there is no space etched out for journaling, it will not happen with the regularity needed to make it valuable. It seems natural to spend time journaling after the day is over and you can sift through all that has transpired. Yet family commitments, evening activities, and fatigue militate against this time slot. Morning offers another possibility. Sleep filters much of the previous day's experiences, and processes deep insights, that can be recorded first thing in the morning. In conjunction with devotions, journaling enables you to begin to weave your experiences with the Word, and also with module material that has been steeping on the back burner of your mind. You will probably find that carrying your journal will allow you to jot down ideas that come to you at odd times throughout the day.

It seems we have been suggesting that journaling is a handwritten exercise. Some may be wondering about doing their work on a computer. Traditionally, there is a special bond between hand, pen, and paper. It is more personal, direct, and aesthetic. And it is flexible, portable, and available.

With regular use, your journal is the repository of your journey. As important as it is to make daily entries, it is equally important to review your work. Read over each week's record at the end of the week. Make a summary statement and note movements of the Holy Spirit or your own growth. Do a monthly review of your journal every 30 days. This might best be done on a half-day retreat where you can prayerfully focus on your thoughts in solitude and silence. As you do this, you will begin to see the accumulated value of the Word, your module work, and your experience in ministry all coming together in ways you had not considered possible. This is integration—weaving together faith development and learning. Integration moves information from your head to your heart so that ministry is a matter of being

rather than doing. Journaling will help you answer the central question of education: "Why do I do what I do when I do it?"

Journaling really is the linchpin in ministerial preparation. Your journal is the chronicle of your journey into spiritual maturity as well as content mastery. These volumes will hold the rich insights that will pull your education together. A journal is the tool for integration. May you treasure the journaling process!

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Lesson 1: Introduction to Preaching

Due This Lesson

None

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants should be able to

- remember the preachers who have shaped them
- evaluate the preachers' influence on them
- define the role of preacher, listeners, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit in preaching

Homework Assignments

Write a three-page paper answering the following questions:

1. How do you know you are called to preach?
2. What is the basis for your authority to preach?
Read: Jer 1:7-9; Mt 28:18-20; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:16-21; 2 Tim 1:3-14; Acts 1:8
3. How do you understand the role of the church in your call to preach and ordination?

Read Resource 1-4, "Good Preaching Comes from Good People." List the two most important qualities you would look for in a pastoral candidate. Write a one- to two-page paper that defines the evidence you think would show a candidate possesses these two qualities. Why do you feel these qualities deserve the board's consideration? At the beginning of the next lesson you will share your paper with a small group and then hand the paper into the instructor.

Journal Prompts

Why has God chosen me to do the work of a preacher?

Reflect on your most recent sermon. How does it measure up to what was discussed in this lesson?

Reflect on the Bible passage that was most meaningful to you.

Preachers of Influence

“Balcony” Preachers

*Who are the preachers in your mental balcony?
Who has preached in a way that you aspire to preach?
Whose preaching became formative in your call to ministry?
How would you describe their preaching?
What personal characteristic made each one a great preacher to you?*

“Basement” Preachers

*Who are the preachers in your mental basement?
How did their preaching wound you?
In what ways do you want to avoid their pattern?
What characteristics made them ineffective?*

What do we already know about preaching before beginning this class?

Small Group

In groups of three complete the following:

Read Mark 4: 1-20.

What does this teach us about preaching?

Note how verses 3-8 focus on the sower/preacher.

Note how verses 13-20 focus on the soil.

Expectations about the Preacher

There are expectations that the preacher be a person of faith, passion, authority, and grace.

- If you have faith, you are believable.
- If you have passion, you are persuasive.
- If you have authority, you understand your calling, gift, and ordination.
- If you have grace, you are one who attends to God.

Good Preaching Comes from Good People

By Wes Tracy

Being a Man or Woman of God Is the First Requirement.

The Church has always required its preachers to be good persons first, good preachers second. The hand that would lead us to Christ must itself be clean, lest it defile the tenderhearted seeker.

We have always known the perceived character of a speaker communicates as much as the words he or she uses. Even Aristotle knew that. "Ethical proof is wrought when the speech is so spoken as to make the speaker credible; for we trust good men more and sooner. . . about what does not admit of precision, but only guess-work, we trust them absolutely. . . the most authoritative of proofs is that supplied by character" (*The Rhetoric*).

Quintilian, the ancient teacher of Roman orators said, 'The orator, then, whom I am concerned to form, shall be a good man speaking well. But above all. . . he must be a good man" (*Instituto Oratoria*).

Christians believe that is doubly true for those who pastor and preach. St. Augustine said, "And so our Christian orator, while he says what is just and holy and good. . . will succeed more by piety in prayer than by the gifts of oratory, and so he [or she] ought to pray for himself [or herself] and for those he [or she] is about to address, before he [or she] attempts to speak. . . [The preacher] ought, before he [or she] opens his [or her] mouth, to lift up [a] thirsty soul to God, to drink in what he [she] is about to pour forth, and so be. . . filled with what he [she] is about to distribute.

"But whatsoever will be the majesty of the style, the life of the speaker will count for more in securing the hearer's compliance.... For there are numbers who seek an excuse in their own evil lives in comparing the teaching with the conduct of their instructors. . . And thus they cease to listen with submission to a man [woman] that does not listen to himself [herself], and in despising the preacher, they learn to despise the word that is preached" (*De Doctrina Christiana*).

George Sweazey wrote his description of a preacher's character with these terms, "As to *character*—honest, straightforward, sincere, patient grave, courageous. . . self-disciplined, on good terms with himself [herself], living truly and deeply. . . In relation to *God*, passionately seeking God, submitting to his will, striving to please him, depending on his grace, devoted without reserve, knowing God, . . . penitent, aware of the need to be forgiven" (*Preaching the Good News*, Prentice Hall, 295).

Pastoral Search:

Suppose you are on the board of a church looking for a new pastor. The district superintendent comes and asks the board what kind of pastor they want. He or she passes around a list of good qualities and asks board members to check the two most important qualities they want in their next pastor. What would you mark?

- A. Skillful preacher
- B. Gifted administrator
- C. Strong character and good reputation
- D. Knows Greek and Hebrew
- E. Good with youth
- F. Emphasizes personal evangelism
- G. Deeply spiritual, a person of prayer
- I. Good leader in community affairs
- J. Good at raising money
- K. Makes a good appearance
- L. Highly educated
- M. Good at pastoral counseling
- N. Good worship leader.
- O. A person you can trust

Assignment:

After reading "Good Preaching Comes from Good People," choose the two qualities you would look for in a pastoral candidate. Write a one to two-page paper that defines the evidence you think would show a candidate possesses these two qualities. Why do you feel these qualities deserve the board's consideration? At the beginning of the next lesson you will share your paper with a small group and then hand the paper into the instructor.

Heard After Church

There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilized and free countries, than the necessity of listening to sermons. No one but a preaching clergyman has . . . the power of compelling an audience to sit silent and be tormented. No one but a preaching clergyman can revel in platitudes, truisms and untruisms, and yet receive, as his undisputed privilege, the same respectful demeanour as though words of impassioned eloquence, or persuasive logic, fell from his lips.

....Anthony Trollope, *Borchester Towers*, 1857

"It is a sin to assemble a congregation each week and enter into the pulpit poorly prepared."

.....Arndt L. Halvorson, *Authentic Preaching*

"Spiritual formation occurs through the ministry of preaching. . . . preaching acts as one of the greatest tools of spiritual formation within the church."

.....Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*

Barbara Brown Taylor tells of her sister who was not raised in the church. She started but said that after listening to the preacher Sunday after Sunday "vent his spleen at God's enemy of the week—alcohol, the lottery, gay people, Santa Claus—she felt as if she had been beaten with a stick" (*When God is Silent*, Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998, 21). Such preaching is not formative preaching.

Formative preaching is described by this definition: "Preaching is an event of the Word. The Living Word (Christ) and the written Word (the Scriptures), in conjunction with the spoken word (sermon), create an event of the Word, as the servant of the Word proclaims upon the housetops what he or she has heard in secret" (Wesley Tracy, *What's A Nice God Like You Doing in a Place Like This?*, p. 11).

Lesson 2: Listening to Scripture

Due This Lesson

Three-page paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- practice the art of listening to a text through the senses and articulate the experience

Homework Assignments

Read the stories in Matthew 8-9

- Describe what you see: _____
- Read the same stories and list things that can be smelled.
- What place does touch play? Who touches whom?
- Select one of these stories and make a listing of occurrences under each sense.

Tape-record yourself reading Matthew 9:18-26. Bring it to the next class.

Journal Prompts

Of the 5 human senses, which one or two are most dominant when you experience Scripture? Why? How can you increase the attentiveness of the minor senses?

What was your favorite story as a child? What was its appeal?

Think back over sermons that really have "stayed" with you. What is it that you remember?

The Word

Hebrews 4: 12-13 (NRSV)

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Revelation 1: 3 (NRSV)

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it.

Different Spoken Forms of Scripture

- The stories of the patriarchs/matriarchs
- The wise “sayings” of Proverbs
- The sermons of the prophets
- The poetry and songs of the Psalms
- The cries and laments of the Psalms
- The Gospels as oral stories
- The letters to the churches written to be read

Engaging Scripture

Much of the educational process today is silent. From grade school through college, students listen to instructors, read, write, take notes, write term papers, sit for exams and graduate. Many students with excellent records enter seminary with 16 years of silent education, now preparing for a vocation that will demand oral presentations every week for the remainder of their lives (Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching*, p. 21).

Perhaps the single biggest failure in the teaching of preaching is that young ministers are not fully impressed with the difference between textuality and orality. Shaped by mountains of books, called upon to write scores of papers, aspiring preachers train the eye but neglect the ear. It is into the world of sound that they go, plying their wares "acoustically" (Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear: Preaching as Self-persuasion*, p. 21).

Thoughts about Preachers

Imagining a Sermon by Thomas H. Troeger

I ask them [preachers] to tell me what they want to preach, and they immediately cast their eyes to a sheet of paper. Their vocal quality and gestures become constricted, and the music of their speech flattens to a drone. (p. 68)

To speak convincingly of a God who calls us to a life of faith and love requires a voice whose tonality is congruent with the personal character of the gospel we proclaim, and this is not possible if the sermon is delivered as printed document that is being read to the congregation. (p. 71)

Getting sound and words to be congruent is a complex issue. It requires a spiritual, theological process of finding that place in the heart where the gospel has touched the preacher's own life. Nothing can replace speaking out of the spiritual center. It is the place from which the melody of redemption arises and permeates our voice. (p. 75)

Lesson 3: Asking Questions of the Scripture Text

Due This Lesson

Responses to Matthew 8-9
Tape recording
Journaling

Learner Objectives

To help students

- practice the art of asking the right questions of the text

Homework Assignments

Read Psalm 137. How do these characters feel? What could have possibly caused these expressions? When have you felt this way? Be prepared to tell this story in class without notes. There will be a three-minute time limit.

For women: Using Matthew 9: 18-26, tell the story from the perspective of the bleeding woman. Be prepared in the next class to stand without notes and assume the role of this woman. Tell us what happened to you. Time limit: three minutes.

For men: Using the same story, tell us the story from the perspective of the synagogue leader. No notes. Three minutes.

Read Resource 3-3, "Good Preaching is Based on the Good Book," and write a one-page paper to compare and contrast this 10-step homiletical process with the five questions presented in Lesson 3.

Reading assignment

Meeting Jesus Again for the Very First Time, by Marcus J. Borg.
Resource 3-2.

Journal Prompt

What would it take to make you a more inquisitive person about a Biblical text?
How have the five questions changed your thinking about sermon preparation?

Five Questions

1. What is the good news here?
2. What is the bad news?
3. How many places can you stand in these two scriptures? How many different vantage points do we find?
4. What is God doing here?
5. What are humans doing here?

Meeting Jesus Again for the Very First Time
By Marcus J. Borg

Borg, Marcus J. *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994. Chapter 6, "Images of Jesus and Images of the Christian Life"

Note: *The publishers are attempting to obtain rights to reprint this chapter from Meeting Jesus Again for the Very First Time. Unfortunately, at the time of this release rights had not been obtained. Your instructor may be able to obtain copies of this material or you can locate the book at a local library or borrow it from a friend.*

Good Preaching Is Based on the Good Book—the Bible

By Wes Tracy

Pop psychology, new age fantasy, cheap grace ideology, and other fads in the pulpit cannot produce spiritual formation. The preacher who takes proclamation seriously turns to Biblical preaching. He or she must, in fact, have a deep and lasting love for the Scriptures.

The homiletical process for formative preaching includes the following steps.

1. Establish the text.

Find the limits of the passage. Be sure you are preaching from a whole paragraph and not from some sub-point made by the Scripture writer on his way to making a more important point. If you know the Biblical languages translate the passage yourself. If you cannot do that, compare several English translations. If they all agree on the general meaning of the passage you can be assured that you are not dealing with a problematical text. Next write a paraphrase of the text in your own everyday words.

2. Isolate the dominant idea(s) of the text.

If you know the Biblical languages you can do this by creating a syntactical display such as you will find in Walter C. Kaiser's *Toward an Exegetical Theology*. If you are not comfortable with Greek and Hebrew, then make a simple outline of the passage in English (or whatever your first language is). Note the topic sentences, sentence subjects, and subordinate modifiers. The point is that the best preaching is done when the preacher proclaims the dominant ideas of the text. To take a subordinate phrase that is just one of several things the passage says is to make a minor point into a major point. At best this creates imbalance, at worst heresy.

3. Determine the type of literature.

What sort of literature is the sermon text? Is it a doom saying like Micah 3:9-12; a poem like Psalm 37, a hymn like Philippians 2:5-11; or a letter like Philemon, or a sermon like 1 Peter, or a historical narrative like the Book of Acts, or a "call passage like Exodus 3:1-4:17?

4. Determine the function of the passage in the book.

Is the text you are working on the introduction to the book, a summary of the book, a greeting or salutation, one of five statements of equal importance in the book, or is it a transition between more important topics? Don't make the Bible book say just one thing when it says five. It is risky business to make a mere transition into a sermon text. It is also risky to build precise doctrinal statements from historical narrative. Know the forms the author used. You will be less likely to abuse his words.

5. Assess the canonical function of the text.

That is, how is the idea expressed in your text used in other books of the Bible? Suppose you are preaching from a text in Isaiah. Does Jesus or Paul quote this passage or allude to it? Isaiah was a favorite of Jesus. Does this same idea get a

different interpretation when it is used elsewhere in Scripture? Compare Hosea 11:8-9 and Matthew 2:15, for example. This step helps you preach on the “general tenor” of Scripture.

6. Probe the socio-historical context.

For example, think how Jesus’ teaching on the second mile must have rankled His first hearers. If you are forced to carry a soldier’s pack a mile, tote it two miles. Judah was occupied by invading Roman soldiers. That stung! Check again how the historical setting affects the interpretation of the Naboth’s Vineyard story treated in 1 Kings 21.

Preachers often neglect this step because it is hard work and requires expensive library resources. But social problems and historical issues influenced nearly every Bible story or passage. Doing this work enables the minister to preach a series of sermons from one book. When you have done the social and historical spadework for the setting of Ephesians or Daniel or Exodus you don’t have to repeat that study from week to week. You merely apply it because you have already done the digging.

7. Soak in the text until it masters you.

Now is the time for serious meditation and prayer. You do not seek to master the text; you let it master you. You become its servant, its voice. Your task as the preacher is to give the text a new hearing. Hopefully the “wine” of the sermon has some time to ferment. That way it relates itself to many things that you read, experience, or think about. This fermentation process is another good reason to plan your preaching for weeks or even months in advance. “A preacher is a person under the control of a message . . . which must be shared” (Halvorson *Authentic Preaching*, 31).

8. Write out the theological affirmations, the timeless principles, of the text.

When you can write down in a sentence or two the timeless principle taught in the text you have the theme and subject of the sermon. The theological affirmations of Micah 3: 9-12, for example, were expressed this way by one preacher. *“When false optimism about God’s blessing and presence corrupts the faith by condoning or creating injustice, God will absent himself from His people, even rooting out the very symbols of such false faith.”*

9. Build the hermeneutical bridge.

Now that you have written down the timeless principles of the text and thus know the subject or theme of the sermon you are ready to build the hermeneutical bridge. The preacher lives in two worlds: the ancient Biblical world and the contemporary scene. These two worlds must be connected if preaching is to be formative. The preacher must be firmly anchored in both worlds. If the preacher knows only the ancient world the preaching seems dry and irrelevant. That preacher will wake up, hopefully, to discover that the people did not come to church with a burning desire to find out whatever happened to the Jebusites! If, on the other hand, the preacher deals only with contemporary fashion and trends the preaching appears shallow—more water than wine.

10. Apply the theologies (timeless principles) of the text to your congregation by way of a carefully crafted sermon.

In what ways does the timeless principle of your text relate to and connect with the contemporary scene of wars, racism, terrorism, divorce, prosperity, wealth, cancer, prayerlessness, and 401Ks? Find ways to be faithful to the Biblical heritage and relevant to the times.

After reading "Good Preaching is Based on the Good Book," write a one-page paper to compare and contrast this 10-step homiletical process with the five questions presented in Lesson 3.

Lesson 4: Looking for Trouble

Due This Lesson

Psalm 137
Matthew 9: 18-26
Borg reading
Journaling

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- detect human trouble in the texts of Scripture as a means of identifying the intersection of scripture and human experience

Homework Assignments

Looking for Trouble

Go “looking for trouble” in one of the following stories as assigned.

- Acts 16: 11-40
- Acts 17: 1-9
- Acts 27: 1—28: 10
- Luke 24: 13-35

In your group complete the following based on the text:

- Have someone read the text aloud.
- What hints of trouble do you hear?
- What is the trouble?
- How is the trouble resolved?
- What can we learn from this?
- How is this trouble like the trouble of the people to whom you will preach?

Plot Line Diagram

Using the plot line diagram (Resource 4-2), plot the story of the Jews in slavery in Egypt. Do the same with the story of Jesus. Refer to the chapter by Marcus J. Borg, “Images of Jesus and Images of the Christian Life.”

Journal Prompt

Write a brief story of your life including a time you were in trouble and how you experienced God.

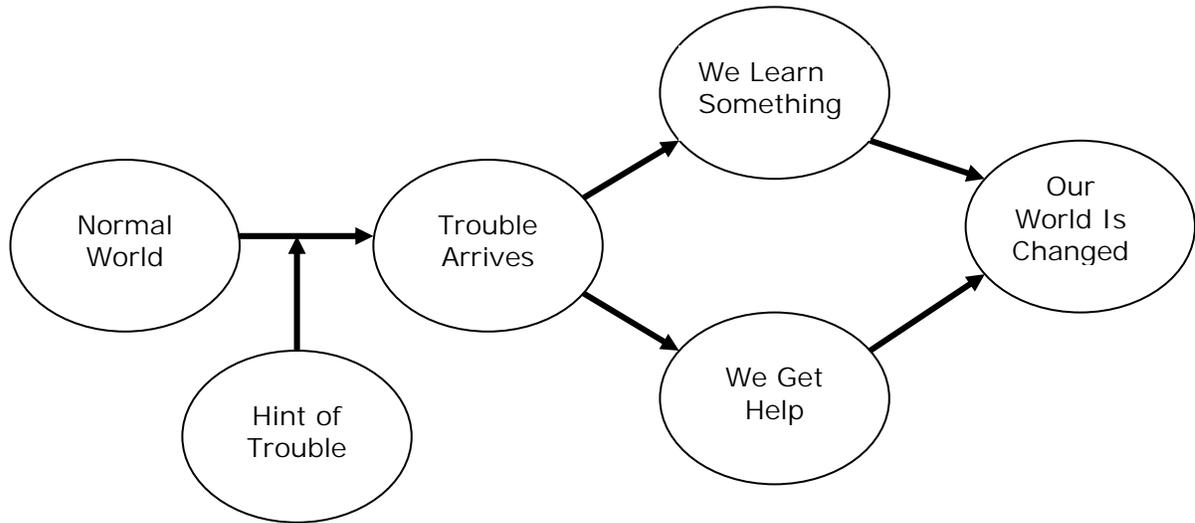
Trouble in the Story

When does a story grab your attention? When do you begin to feel the intensity?

Stories with trouble

- *The Brothers Karamazov*
- "The Little Boy Who Cried Wolf"
- *Titanic*
- "Jack and Jill"
- The Creation account of Genesis 1-3
- Daniel
- "Three Little Pigs"

Plot Line Diagram



Seven Helps for Preaching from a Narrative Plot

1. Plot the story noting the common thread that holds the story together. Know where the story is going.
2. Develop the characters. Give them shape and form. Let them breathe. Note how they change and are changed as the story develops.
3. From what point of view is the story told? Whose vantage point governs the story? Example: Luke 1:26-38. Is this told from the perspective of Mary? The angel? God?
4. Capitalize on the dialogue. We are given the conversational skeleton in the text. Hang some skin on these bones and allow imagination to flesh out the conversation. Dialogue drives the plot and gives the story depth.
5. Watch the verbs. Go through the story and underline the verbs. This is the heart of God's activity. You want the sermon to be doing what these verbs are doing.
6. Preach the imperatives. Whatever the story calls on its characters to do, you must call on the congregation to do. The story is not told for our enjoyment, but for the sake of our identity and response. The story tells us who we are and how we are to behave in this world as the people of God.
7. Start the sermon with the tension of the story. Get somebody in trouble early on and let them wrestle trying to get out of trouble. Show Adam hiding from God or Jonah running from God. Or tell the story of a nonbiblical character with the same trouble as Adam or Jonah. The gospel is bad news before it is good news. We cannot get to a strong theology of grace except via a strong theology of human trouble.

Trouble is early in the plot, not late. And trouble is not the final word. We don't need long bashings about the mess we've gotten ourselves into. Don't fall into the trap of using the pulpit to bash and blame people, then walk away with your guns smoking thinking you have really preached. Good preaching moves to grace and hope that is celebrated!

Deductive and Inductive Preaching

Deductive Preaching

- Proceed from general truth to specific information.
- Give them the correct answer and then tell them the question.
- Show them the completed puzzle, and then explain how it was put together.

Inductive Preaching

- Proceed from specific situation to a recognized truth.
- Ask the questions and explore the options before arriving at conclusions.
- Empty the puzzle pieces out on the table and construct the puzzle piece by piece.

Lesson 5: Working with Images, Incidents, and Issues

Due This Lesson

Bible story
Plot line diagram
Journaling

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- practice the art of working with textual images as the means of broadening the interest in the text by preacher and listener

Homework Assignments

One-page Paper

Where in the last 24 hours have you seen God at work? What was God doing? How would you tell someone the story of what you observed God doing? What biblical image captures the essence of this activity? Write a one-page paper to be shared with the class during the next class.

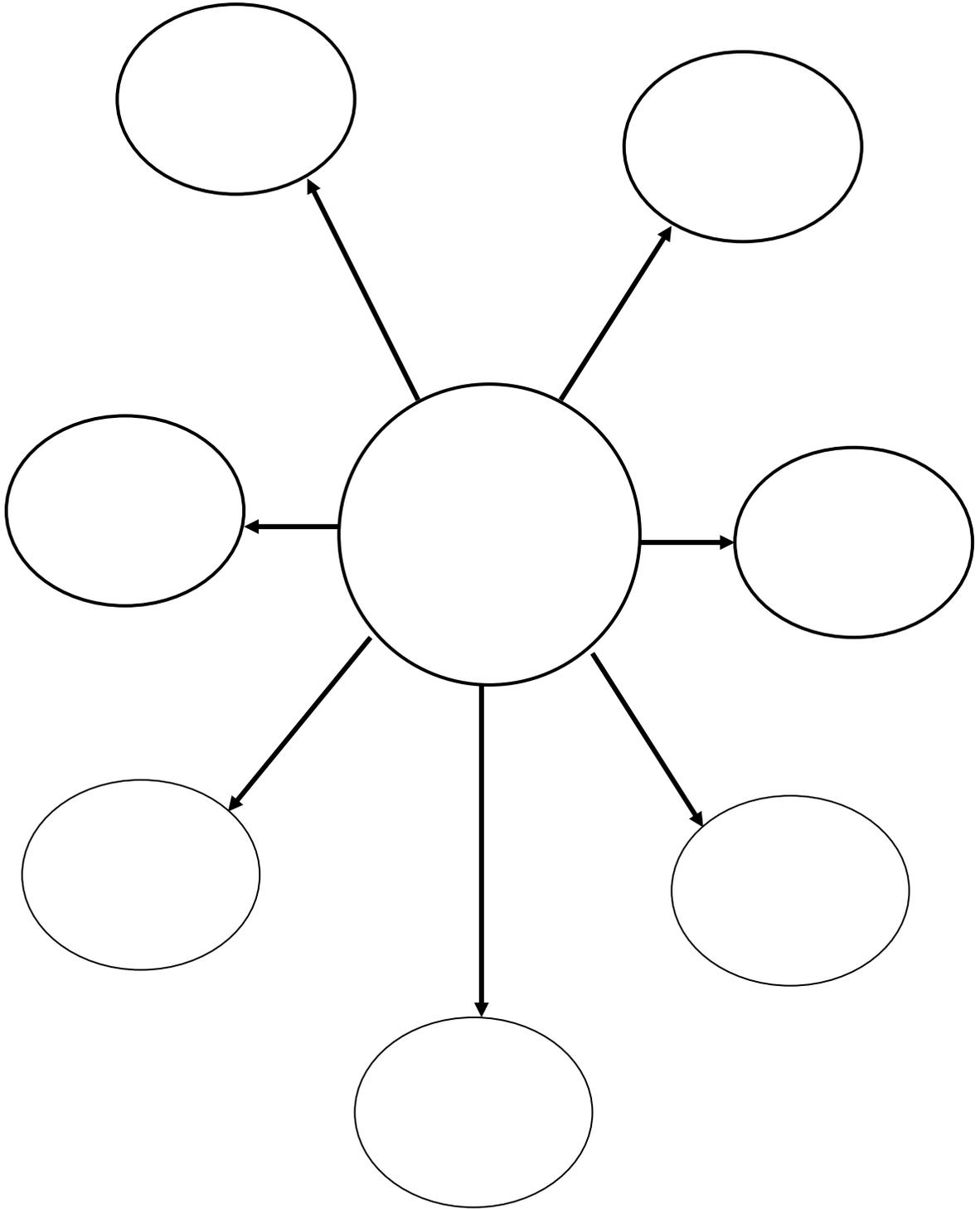
Reading Assignment

Read *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* by Paul Scott Wilson. Resource 5-2.

Journal Prompt

If you could not use words to speak about the gospel, what Christian symbol would you choose to portray your faith?

Images



Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching

Paul Scott Wilson

Excerpts from Chapter One: Imagination's Poles How Imagination Works¹

To know how imagination works we need to know how language works, how words act together to produce meaning. I will be arguing here that imagination of the heart is not a mystical experience, although there is still mystery involved, but rather it is similar to other acts of meaning in the communication process. We may understand it as *the bringing together of two ideas that might not otherwise be connected and developing the creative energy they generate*. Normally, however, we may not think of imagination as having anything to do with language. We may think of it as the ability to picture something and may connect it more with vision than with words. This needs to change. Imagination may at times be a kind of wordless mystery that will involve pictures or other forms of mental sensory images. And pictorial imagery may at times enable us to find words, as Ignatian meditation exercises suggest. But in general we may understand that imagination is released by an ability to use polarities in language to create fresh ideas. Many of these ideas will present pictures to the mind, but imagination that finds expression through words is essentially a function of language. Without language we are unable to express thought. It is through the windows of language that we view reality, that we interpret actions, that we understand our emotions and our faith. The subject is a difficult one, however, and it may be useful before going into some of the scholarship in the area, for us to resort to pictures to show how imagination functions.

There are two ways in which it might be helpful for us to picture how imagination works. One way is to consider a close personal relationship like a marriage. In a marriage that works well, both people are confident in their own individual identities. If one person becomes lost in the identity of the other, much of the spark of the relationship may be gone. But if the partners, while being committed to each other, support individual growth and identity, the spark will be maintained. What we have here are three identities: the two individual identities and the third identity that is the relationship itself. It is characterized by the way the couple behaves as a couple. If this relationship is strong, we might say that there is a spark between them. Imagination in language is like this kind of vital relationship, except that in language it is two ideas brought together, each with its own identity, to create a third new identity by their union.

From my senior physics class in high school comes a second way of picturing how imagination works. The teacher had brought out an old generator. Taken from an old farmhouse telephone, it was the kind that had to be cranked by hand. Both the negative and positive poles of the generator had a wire attached. A student kept cranking while the teacher brought the ends of the two wires closer and closer together. When the ends were six inches apart, a spark jumped through the air with a snap. When the ends were four inches apart, there was a crackling sound and a waving but constant

¹ Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988). Used by permission.

spark between the two ends. When the wires were touching there was no visible spark although the current was flowing

Imagination in language is like this spark between the poles of the generator. The spark of imagination happens when two ideas that seem to have no apparent connection (standing "poles apart," we might say) are brought together. Two conditions are necessary for imagination: (1) some connection between the ideas must be possible and (2) the ideas chosen must not be almost identical, for then they would function like the touching wires that had no visible spark. Most acts of communication happen with the wires touching and the current of meaning flowing directly from one idea to another with little or no spark visible.

Imagination similarly is the product of two ideas or "opposites" in relationship. The case that is being made here is that imagination operates in language, not in just pictures outside of language. Metaphor is language that exercises imagination. Imagination is not something magical or mysterious and unknown, even though its effect may seem both magical and mysterious. We have to know this if we are ever going to trust our creative abilities. As long as we cast an air of total mystique around imagination, we will assign it to the unknowable and thus also to the unachievable.

Using Imagination with Individual Words

Perhaps even more important for imagination than this, however, is the understanding that language lives and language dies. The reason it is more important we will see in a moment. Whenever words lose some of their spark for us they have died a little. We experience this kind of death in language when a favorite tune on the radio becomes a matter of indifference; or when in worship the same phrase used week after week without variation ceases to have meaning for us; or when an idea that was fresh and alive for us at a conference becomes dry and shriveled when left forgotten in a drawer for months.

The decay of meaning in language is predictable. This can lead, as noted already, to streamlining language and to effective communication. On the other hand it can eventually lead to dropping entire words from our vocabulary. Anthropologists working with Inuit people in the North American Arctic have actually used this predictable process of decay in language to help them date the origin of some of the isolated communities; assuming that these communities have a common origin, they suggest that every one hundred years they lose half of the words they have in common as new words are invented to replace the old. In 1986 some Canadian Inuit were brought together for the first time with some Russian Inuit, and it was discovered that they still had some words in common. Readers who know the basic physics may find it helpful to think of the decay of meaning in language as being similar to the decay of radioactive isotopes according to their particular half-lives.

The decay of language is important for preachers to understand, particularly those who are learning to use the imagination. Quite simply, many of the words we commonly use to talk about the faith have lost their spark. Repeated use of them without exposing them to imagination will have no more positive effect on the congregation than will raising the voice in giving directions to someone who does not speak our language. As Edward F. Marquart has identified the problem:

Most of the laity do not have "gut associations" with such words as salvation, redemption, incarnation, gospel, and theology of the cross. Ninety-eight percent of our laity don't use these words in their everyday lives. This becomes a

problem for many of us clergy because we all have our favorite words . . . (someone) said to Reuel Howe, "If I used that much jargon with my customers, I would lose them."

Too many of our big theological words seem to our people like a lost herd of cattle out on the back forty. The solution is not just to cut back on the use of these words: jargon is still jargon used once or one hundred times. Nor is the solution to eliminate them entirely from our preaching. *The words of the Christian faith are gifts to us. They are treasures of which we are the stewards: We cannot let them die for they can be the route to true life.* The solution then must lie in another direction.

The solution has to do with language renewal. Just as words can defray and die, so too can they be renewed and have fresh life. The words of our faith are precious, yet they sometimes litter the floor like unthreshed husks of wheat. Some people would tread on them underfoot. For them the words are dead; they may have heard the words but they never received them as life. When these same words are gathered up with care and thrown into the air, the Holy Spirit has a chance to blow through them, to winnow them, to sift out the good news anew. They are renewed when they are seen or heard as though for the first time, when they have life again, when people want to use them because they have again become important for them.

Language renewal is not the task of a few. It is the task of everyone in the church, but it is the particular task of preachers. Said quite starkly, *language renewal is faith renewal.* Faith can be renewed by actions, but faith seeks understanding, and understanding comes from words and ideas.

Perhaps it would be better for some people in our society to have never heard about the Christian faith than to have the distorted understanding of it that they have. For them in particular, and for many of our church regulars as well, new ways to understand old words are essential. Because we love the words of our faith, and because we love to use them well and hear them well used, we take care of them. We want to polish them in all of their natural beauty like restored wood, so that others may run their fingers along the contours and know God's truth.

How does imagination give back to us freshness some of our words that are worn out and coming apart at the seams? As noted, retracing the origin of many of our words and recreating opposition is one route. Another is to reach outside of the word itself to create a new opposition or juxtaposition. Let us say that we are wanting to use the word "salvation" in a new way. For imagination we need to have what Coleridge called the reconciliation of opposites. We need two poles and we already have one in the word "salvation." Like the wires of the generator, the "opposites" cannot be so far apart that no connection is possible and yet cannot be so close together than they are touching. "Salvation" can have no legitimate connection, for instance, with "bomb." There is a false connection, of course, of the sort we find in so many of the false salvation promises of our culture such as in the lotteries and the life-style beer advertisements. But since no relationship of truth can be established with "bomb," there can be no spark of imagination of the heart. The wires are held too far apart. Imagination of the heart is scripturally based and the spark must have biblical warrant.

Or again, there can be no spark if the ideas are so similar that the wires are touching: the words "salvation" and "redemption" are so similar as to be almost identical. The preacher who talks about salvation as redemption will catch a lot of the congregation

snoozing. But if the preacher tries substituting another word to juxtapose with salvation, a spark with biblical warrant may be found. Salvation can imply a positive experience. There are many positive experiences that might be effective, but one obvious one for Christians might be eating a meal. Bring that experience alongside the word "salvation" and there will be a spark that opens fresh and yet familiar biblical horizons for faith: "salvation is eating a meal." A congregation would be interested to hear the preacher develop this idea.

Of course this is only one instance of imagination or reconciliation of opposites. We could create many more with a word like "salvation." Simply try substituting any number of other positive experiences in place of eating a meal. But since salvation is inseparable from the cross, we might want alternatively to try some other fresh juxtapositions that we could develop in our preaching, such as "cross," "electric chair," "humiliation," or "vulnerability." Obviously in developing some of these for preaching we would need to be careful not to justify the suffering and oppression God opposes so clearly in the Scriptures. Moreover, we need not use every one. But as Arthur Koestler noted over and over again in his *Act of Creation*, the imaginative breakthroughs of creative people have occurred because of their ability to go beyond the usual frameworks of their disciplines and to associate ideas in unusual ways.

It takes no genius to play with free association. For us it can be an act of freedom. Part of the process can be a creative mulling, even without words, using music or art to awaken non-discursive realities, before we move to words. But when we move to words, do not dismiss apparently inappropriate juxtapositions before mulling them over in your mind. *Too often we cut off our considerable creative talents because we jump in too quickly to try to evaluate theological truth. As Jesus said in one of the parables, let the seeds grow and then do the wedding. Ask yourself, "Is there a way this might be true?"*

To be creative we need to be willing to live long enough with the tension between ideas to be able to explore freely. Even though not every juxtaposition will be appropriate, there will be a few we could develop and elaborate in preaching. We simply keep free-associating and substituting until something is alive for us.

Creating opposites, either from within the origin of individual words or by bringing one word or idea alongside another, is to begin to see the power of imagination. As preachers we must start with individual words; later on we will be discussing how individual words can function as one-word stories. Once we see how juxtaposition is done, we can see how others have created in exciting ways. For example, when Frederick Buechner said that it was harder for a rich person to enter the Realm of God than for a Mercedes to go through a revolving door, he probably used this process of free-associating and substitution of individual words. As a substitute for "camel" he settled on "Mercedes" (what do rich people ride in today?) and as a substitute for "eye of a needle" he settled for "revolving door" (which a car would have difficulty going through). The reconciliation of these two ideas of "Mercedes" and "revolving door" is an example of imagination.

Imagination creates new windows in language for us, opens up new possibilities of faith for us, gives us new eyes with which to view the world, and gives us new words with which to proclaim the glory of Christ. Is this not also the task of preaching in the life of the church? Preaching renews the language of the faith, even as it preserves and perpetuates it.

Lesson 6: Pausing to Let the Text Speak to Me

Due This Lesson

One-page paper
Reading from Paul Scott Wilson
Journaling

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- practice the art of receiving help from a text as a vital part of identifying one's interest in the text

Homework Assignments

Read

Read "Preaching from Within Our Own Hope" by Don Wardlaw. Be prepared to share in class what this article says to you about preaching. Resource 6-3.

Survey

Preaching requires that we know ourselves. Unless we are aware of the doubts, questions, and struggles going on inside us, we will tend to project these upon our congregation and preach at them. This is called shadow-side preaching. Fill out "Exegeting Yourself," Resource 6-4.

Read

Read John 13:1-17 and answer the following questions:

1. What sounds like good news to me?
2. What sounds like bad news to me?
3. Which characters do I identify with? Jesus? Peter? Judas?
4. What issue in my life is similar to the issue of this text?
5. Why do I care about this text?

Journal Prompt

What is it like when God speaks to you through scripture? When was the last time this happened? What did God say?

Text Study

Complete the following tasks.

- Underline the key ideas that stand out to you, then go back and ask why this is important to you.
- Where do you find yourself resisting this text? What part of the text do you want to avoid?
- Is there anything in the text that frightens you?
- What issues in your life are similar to the issue of the text?
- Why do you care about this text?
- What sounds like good news to you?
- What sounds like bad news to you?

Select one of the following texts and answer the above questions.

John 13: 1-17

Psalm 51

Philippians 2: 5-11

Luke 24: 13-35

Thoughts from Fred Craddock *Preaching*²

All preaching is to some extent self-disclosure by the preacher. This is not offered as a comment on the practice in some quarters of making the pulpit a confessional. . . . It is simply the truth about communication. (p. 23)

Pertaining to the minister's own faith journey, it is the reflection of many who have spent a lifetime in ministry that of all the exercises for keeping athletically fit one's Christian values, perspectives and faith, none excels that of preparing and delivering sermons. (p. 23)

The preacher is expected to be a person of faith, passion, authority and grace. Faith makes one believable, and if the messenger is not believable, neither is the message. The absence of faith is almost impossible to disguise for any period of time. No one can increase the volume in the pulpit to such a level as to muffle the echo of lost convictions. (p. 24)

² Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

Preaching from Within Our Own Hope

Don M. Wardlaw³

Imagine a guide hired to lead an expedition through a dark forest, and then on up a mountain to its majestic peak. The guide deftly steers the party into the deep forest, past ferocious beasts, through infested underbrush, and alongside a treacherous bog. Then, to our shock, the guide suddenly bolts from the hikers and disappears into a thicket, leaving the party stranded in terror, with only a desperate longing for the clear air of the mountain heights far ahead and above.

At first glance we might assume the guide's strange and callous behavior unthinkable. Yet think again. That same disappearing act happens Sunday after Sunday in Christian sanctuaries. The great majority of us preachers set out in our sermons to guide congregations through dark forests of despair and then on up the majestic climbs of hope. But somewhere deep among the vines and shadows, beside the bog of human grief and loss, under the gaze of beasts of war and violence, we preachers often unwittingly abandon our people. I see this kind of fadeaway too often for comfort in my own sermons. I see it in the dozens of sermons I examine every year as a consultant with pastors and as a teacher at seminary. Whatever the differences in our sermons, I find one nagging constant, strong beginnings but flabby endings. We preachers most often begin strongly by skillfully guiding our hearers through the tangled thickets of their grief and rage to dark campsites where they bed down again with their fears and shudder at the calls of the wild in their hearts. And precisely at this moment where our hearers need us the most to lead them out of this wilderness to the high vista of hope, we frequently fade from view.

At this pivotal point in their journey, our people need to see images of the gospel of hope happening in the flesh, images such as an alcoholic by God's grace smashing her bottle of gin and reaching for the phone to call her sponsor in A.A., or an inventive band of Christians by God's transforming power orchestrating housing for the homeless. Such specific visions of human transformation are the drawing power from the mountain of hope that entices people out of their paralysis of despair. But, instead, what we too often give our people amid the dark forest are abstract treatises about hope. We shift gears from human drama to doctrine, from red-blooded struggle to sky-blue thinking. Don't get me wrong; statements in the reflective mode have a crucial place in preaching, particularly in introducing or summarizing controlling themes. But when at a time when our people most need concreteness we cloak ourselves with the cotton wool of abstractions, we in effect fade away into clouds of generalities that can only obscure the mountain of hope.

Why do we preachers often abscond into the mists at the point our people most need to taste and touch the hope in the gospel? One possible answer is that we are drawn to abstractions at the point where we lose a visceral link with what we preach. My own faith journey could be described as an attempt to connect³ with what I preach. When we don't live out of a vibrant sense of hope in our own flesh, we won't be prone to tune into it in anyone else's flesh. Hope might be happening all around us: when we see the woman next door receiving chemotherapy and going out to plant her garden;

³ (Used by permission of the author.)

when we see Russian citizens defiantly toppling the statues of the founder of the KGB. But such signs can't dance as symbols before our eyes as if we don't have faith's eyes to see them, if we don't have hope-filled souls that can awake to human possibilities for wholeness all around us. Hence the awkward, intolerable feeling of trying to give to others what we don't own ourselves.

The extent to which we feel this vacuum, whether consciously or unconsciously, measures the extent to which we reach for abstractions to cover the void. To abstract anything is to release it from its earthly moorings. "Abstract" means "to take from," to soar above ground. Majoring in abstractions in sermons is like riding a hot air (!) balloon high enough to see the whole forest of human struggle and despair. How many times have I talked in general about encounters with God rather than risk getting blown out of the saddle with St. Paul on the Damascus Road. From this safe, lofty vantage we may be working on the clinching section of Sunday's sermon on hope. We may be proud of the quotes from Tillich and Moltmann, and the analogies from a sermon service we plan to use to color our own broad insights. Up in our balloon we sail toward Sunday, once more with borrowed material to quell our anxiety about what to say. Yet, in marshalling all this generic information about hope, we may fail to see that we are, ironically, acting out our own despair. Surely general reflections supported with the wisdom of known experts can play an important role in our preaching by clarifying and lending authority to what we say. But when we most often find ourselves rifling our shelves and files for something to say *about* hope far more than plumbing our souls for things to share *from* hope, then we preach mainly from despair. Couching hope chiefly in abstractions in our preaching is tantamount to deserting our people. In taking flight from our people's entangled trail, we may be using generalities to muffle the sound of their pain. Even more, our attraction to abstractions at this moment may be our final defense against coming to grips with our own repressed anxiety, rage, and grief that are aroused by our people's lostness. With abstractions we desert ourselves; not just our people.

Our flight from darkness into the comfort of generics can also keep a congregation paralyzed. "Intellect by itself moves nothing," said Aristotle. What gives people the resolve to rise from the edge of the bog, slay the beast, and move out of the forest is the hope they can experience in and through us. Not borrowed hope, but relational hope that rings true with our own reality. Our people need to know that we, too, experience what it is like to be lost in the woods, to be immobilized by our rage over injustice, our fears for our health, and our depression over sagging self-esteem. Above all, our congregations need to sense that we have glimpsed the way out and have even scouted some paths up the mount of hope. "Preachers err," said Joseph Campbell, "by trying to talk people into belief; better they reveal the radiance of their own discovery" (*The Power of Myth*, xvi).

We preach hope effectively to the extent that we recollect the experiential ground of our own hope. That discovery begins as we fall into step behind Jesus on His way to the final showdown in Jerusalem. If hope places its bets on the future, we see hope in Jesus' eyes and gait as He is drawn by His own sense of completion toward the city set on a hill. We see the horizon beyond Jerusalem that will light up with the glow of resurrection the first Easter morning radiating an irresistible pull the closer Jesus gets to Jerusalem's gates on Palm Sunday. We see with Matthew at the end of his Gospel the picture of the risen Christ in command atop a mountain of Galilee, offering a charge to his disciples. Through this image we see Christ as our mountain of hope, drawing us forth from the fearful forest.

But that magnetic pull toward wholeness also drew Jesus down through the dark wood of Gethsemane and onto the terrible timber at Calvary. Easter horizons necessarily have crosses etched against them. At night in the garden we watch Jesus sweat blood in an immense struggle with His humanity over the price to be paid for wholeness. Under a midnight sky on a Friday afternoon we stand at the foot of the Cross and shudder at the excruciating death He embraces as prelude to fullness. He gives himself to the beast in the shadowy forest.

To follow Jesus in this path of suffering and glory is to pattern paradigms of hope in our personal corporate consciousness. It means opening ourselves to God's future for us, to a mountain up ahead whose living Christ draws us toward a union with the self and society we were meant to be. As individuals it means sensing a pull toward a resurrection horizon in self-understanding and self-acceptance we previously never dreamed was up ahead; ease from obsessive striving to impress; release from a shame-based fixation with duty; relief from a censorious spirit. As the church, it means answering a call from the mountain ahead that draws our faithful company toward an experience of authentic community we never before saw on the horizon: a place where we can lay down our burdens, find strength to suffer for peace and justice, and be nourished by pulpit and table.

But the Christ pattern in our lives not only pulls us toward wholeness but also of necessity leads us down through the dread forests of our own Gethsemanes and Golgothas. Here we come face-to-face with all our griefs and losses, at last, in Edward Whitmont's words "unbarring the door to the stranger." None of us asks for this darkness. Usually foolish indiscretion, abiding depression, sudden bereavement, colossal failure, or life-threatening illness stretches us out on our cross as we moan in apparent abandonment. Few congregations ask for the wilderness either. Usually we are exiled there by our triumphalism, worship of clay idols, sell-out to Caesar, and internal power struggles. But by God's grace mentors, counselors, pastors, and friends take up with us as wise guides amid our tangled wood. We learn to trust them in ways we do not trust ourselves because we sense they know the darkness. They help us hone in on the healing, transforming power that draws us as individual and corporate souls toward Christ's mount of wholeness. In that ambience of hope, born of exquisite daily deaths, we find ourselves preaching vividly and passionately about life beyond the forest on yonder slopes. With the writer to the Hebrews, "we who have fled for refuge . . . have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us." In learning within ourselves to trust the vision of Christ on the mountain, we are learning to trust ourselves as guides on the hope-filled way.

EXEGETING YOURSELF

1. What kind of family did I come from?
2. How was authority used in my family?
3. In what socioeconomic class am I most at home?
4. What do I like to read?
5. What music do I prefer?
6. What are my favorite forms of entertainment?
7. Who do I most easily relate to?
8. What kind of people do I avoid?
9. What is my personality type?
10. What am I afraid of?
11. How do I view the Bible?

Lesson 7: Consulting the Scholars

Due This Lesson

Reading, Resource 6-3
Survey, Resource 6-4
John 13: 1-17 study
Journaling

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- experience the process of studying a text by using available resources

Homework Assignments

Sermon Preparation

Using Luke 24: 13-35, walk through all six steps of sermon preparation from Lessons 2-7. You will write one page on each of the following:

1. Experience the text through the senses—write notes for each sense
2. Ask questions of the text—answer the Lesson 3 questions
3. Look for trouble—plot the story line of the text
4. Identify the image, incident, or issue—create an image page
5. Pause to let the text help you—answer the questions in Lesson 6
6. Consult the scholars—arrive at a summary sentence, Resource 7-2

(Luke 24: 13-35 will be the scripture from which you will work for your sermon to be given during the last class sessions.)

Journal Prompt

Where can you find good resources for studying Scripture? List all possibilities you can think of.

Studying a Text

1. Understand the book of the Bible from which the text comes.
2. What kind of literature is this? Story? Psalm? Proverb? Letter? History? Prophecy?
3. Select a Bible translation by reading several different versions of the Bible.
4. Read commentaries, work studies, and lectionary resources.
5. Read other sermons and articles on the text you are preparing to preach from.

Consulting the Scholars

In preparing your sermon on Luke 24:13-35 and in completing the homework for this lesson, you will need to consult commentaries on this scriptural passage. Suggested commentaries and resources you may wish to consult are listed below. These may be available in university and public libraries, or the library of your pastor or friends.

Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. In *Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.

Nickle, Keith F. *Preaching the Gospel of Luke: Proclaiming God's Royal Rule*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000.

Talbert, Charles H. *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*. New York: Crossroad, 1984.

Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986-1990.

Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.

Lesson 8: Exegeting the Congregation

Due This Lesson

Six steps of sermon preparation
Journaling

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- ask questions about the people who will hear the sermon
- keep them in mind while creating a sermon

Homework Assignments

Using the ideas from Resource 8-2, select two of the four as part of the preparation for your sermon. Write a one-page paper about what you discovered.

Journal Prompt

Select one troubled person in your congregation. Write about his or her life as if you were in his or her skin.

Exegeting Your People

1. What age groups are most strongly represented in my congregation?
2. What socioeconomic groups are represented?
3. How do most of my people relate to authority?
4. Are my people in authority in their world or under authority?
5. What do my people like to read?
6. How do they entertain themselves?
7. What music do my people listen to?
8. What is their educational background?
9. What is the history of this people/congregation?
10. How do these people learn? Listen? Process decision?
11. How do my people view the Bible?

Exercises for Knowing Your Listeners

1. List the names of 20 listeners and ask yourself what the text might mean to them.

2. Play a game called "what is it like to be _____." Fill in the blank with common situations.

Examples:

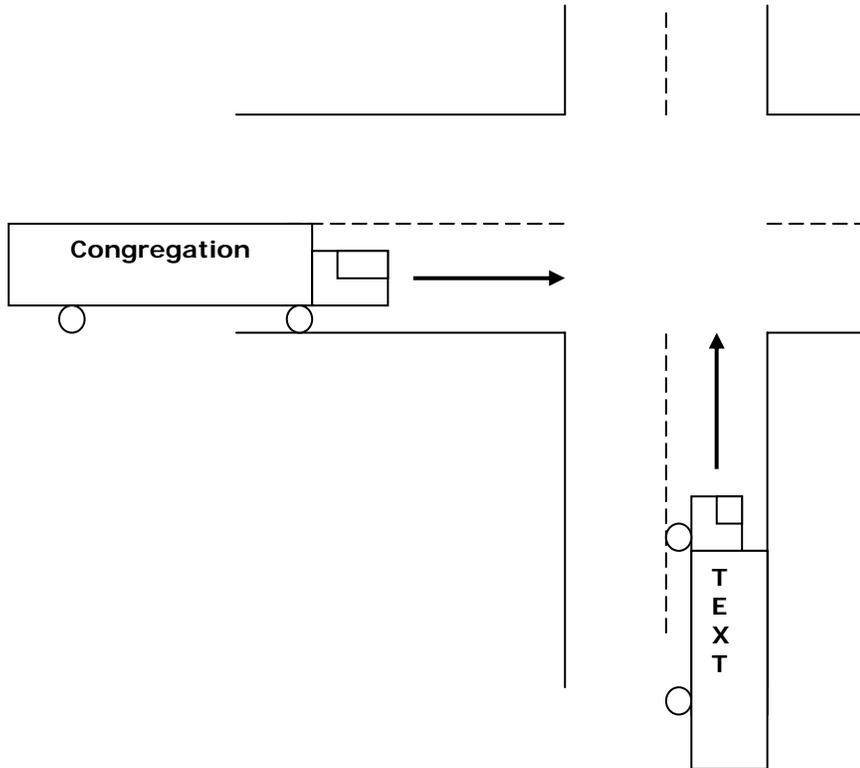
- 5 years old and starting school
- 13 with pimples
- engaged
- losing your job
- in a difficult marriage
-

By identifying places where people often find themselves, you can ask how people in these situations might hear this text.

3. Gather a group of people and ask them about their hopes, fears, hurts, and beliefs. Keep the text in the back of your mind as you listen to people. Connect the dots between the activity of God in the text and the trouble of these people.

4. How will children hear this text? Youth? Older Adults?

Intersecting the Text and Congregation



Lesson 9: Selecting the Form of the Sermon

Due This Lesson

One-page paper
Journaling

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- become acquainted with some of the basic sermon forms
- illustrate how a text could take shape with each form

Homework Assignments

Read Resource 9-2.

Using Resource 9-2 for guidance, write a summary of intent for your sermon on Luke 24. Your written summary of intent is due at the beginning of Lesson 11.

In Lesson 10 we will listen to two sermons and discuss their structure and form. Read Resource 9-3, "Good Preaching Needs Good Structure," and be prepared to analyze these sermons in light of the principles presented here.

Journal Prompt

Which of the sermon forms in Lesson 9 seem best suited to you? Why?

Four Sermon Forms

Running the Story

This sermon form uses the plot line that already exists in the story itself. It follows the pattern of normal world>hint of trouble>trouble arrives>we learn something/we get help>our world is changed. We become storytellers who use our imagination to fill in the details of the senses.

Stitching Stories

Have you ever watched someone stitch a patchwork quilt? They connect small pieces together to make a whole. In this sermon form, the preacher uses similar-size stories with a common thread and connects them.

Four Pages of the Sermon

This sermon has four moves and is balanced in the middle with move one-two on one side of the seesaw and move three-four on the other side.

- 1—sin/trouble in the text
- 2—sin/trouble in the world
- 3—grace in the text
- 4—grace in the world

Three-Point Sermon

This is the classic form and still useful for preachers today. Do not go looking for three points in a text as raw material for a sermon. Let the text suggest how it wishes to be preached. One of the best three-point forms is one called sociology, psychology, and theology.

The Sermon Purpose Statement

by Don Wardlaw⁴

The purpose statement declares your strategy of persuasion for the particular preaching situation in light of your learning goals for the Preaching Ministry Project and course learnings. The purpose statement suggests why and how you intend to ask your people to travel with you in the sermon.

The purpose statement reflects the dynamics of each preaching situation. Every preaching moment, whether or not you are with the same congregation, calls for a different purpose and statement. The purpose statement consists of three stylized parts:

1. SITUATION an introductory clause that indicates the situation of your congregation that elicits this sermon at this time
example: "In view of the Elmview congregation's recent vote to lower their giving to benevolence causes"
2. GOAL a simple statement that suggests what you want the hearers to experience, where you hope the congregation will "travel" experientially during the sermon. Generally, sermons do not dispense information for the hearers to recall; they are not cognitive lessons. Rather, the hearing of a sermon is a lived experience that touches the hearer in ways other than the intellectual.
example: ". . . I want the people to experience the satisfaction of sacrificial giving for worthy causes"
3. MEANS A qualifying phrase or clause that pictures how or by what particular rhetorical means you will lead your hearers into this experience in order to be persuasive; the means for enabling the experience of the sermon to happen.
example: ". . . by means of a series of vignettes showing how sacrificial giving has strengthened a congregation's faith."

Hence, a sermon purpose statement: "In view of the Elmview congregation's recent vote to lower their giving to benevolence causes, I want the people to experience the satisfaction of sacrificial giving for worthy causes, by means of a series of vignettes showing how sacrificial giving has strengthened a congregation's faith."

Consider, for instance, a sermon on inner peace preached before a parish composed of seminarians. Assume the gist of your sermon is:

Our hope for inner peace lies in surrendering to God's grace rather than trying to earn God's forgiveness.

Your sensitivity to particular needs at Hoping and Praying Seminary now enables you to shape your purpose statement.

⁴ Used by permission of the author.

(situation) in view of the number of the Hoping and Praying community that seem self-conscious about their goodness and so tense about their well-being. (goal) I want my H and P hearers to experience salvation as a gift rather than as something earned, (means) by means of a reenactment of what happened in theology class one day.

Suppose, however, your sermon on peace is to be preached before an affluent congregation in the established suburb of Oak Hills. You note that many of the congregation plod incessantly either on the business or social treadmill, trying to establish and maintain some sense of belonging and self-worth in the community. Again, the theme is the same as above. But this time your purpose could read:

(situation) In view of apparent hunger in Oak Hills for a sense of well-being that neither successful careers nor social status seems to satisfy, (goal) I want my Oak Hills hearers to experience a deep sense of well-being as God's gift and not as a result of their own attainment, (means) by means of dramatizing several different types of Oak Hills residents.

Once more, you anticipate preaching this sermon before a congregation of elderly people in a changing neighborhood. These people are the few who either chose or were forced to remain with this local parish when the majority of the members fled to the suburbs. Now you see your hearers preoccupied with inflation, crime in the streets, and the loneliness that belongs to forgotten oldsters. Your purpose statement:

(situation) In view of my elderly congregation's fear that they have little strength to provide for and protect themselves, (goal) I want to enable them to experience possibilities for opening themselves to God's provision and protection amid an alien environment, (means) by means of three stories depicting how senior citizens banded together to bring about peace in their changing neighborhood and to discover the gift of peace in themselves.

Good Preaching Needs Good Structure

By Wes Tracy

Good sermon structure does not guarantee good preaching, but poor structure nullifies good preaching. It is important to know how the culture or generation to which you preach makes meaning, how it expresses and receives communication.

In the current North American and Asian cultures, for example, narrative style and inductive structure seem to be most effective. Try to incorporate these principles of induction into your sermon preparation.

Principle No.1: Inductive preaching helps people listen longer and better, promoting interest, involvement, and suspense by strategically delaying conclusions.

Induction is that form of logical discourse that establishes the general by way of the specific. That is, the inductive argument moves from the specific to the general. The proofs, the evidences, are revealed one step at a time. As the series of examples, questions, cases, and illustrations unfolds, a pattern develops, and then the general truth testified to by real-life specifics is established.

In an inductive sermon the preacher may explore "answers" or ideas suggested by the newspaper; a bumper sticker; an overheard conversation, a poem, an incident in Mr. Jones's family. All of these put together may show a pattern of God's providence in human life. After establishing the principle (and only after establishing the principle) by real-life specifics, the preacher then anchors the specifics on a rock of Biblical truth by citing a Scripture about the very hairs of our heads being numbered and the God who notices every sparrow that falls. Enhanced by existential proofs, the text then carries a ton of truth home to the mind and heart. Though inductive logic is not as airtight as deduction's syllogisms, it can be even more powerful.

But we all have been taught to preach deductively. We announce the general truth and try to apply it to life's specifics. This is valid. Deduction has a good record, but it is less effective today than before.

Next Sunday the typical pastor will step to the pulpit, announce his or her conclusions, and then try to get the people to pay attention while the preacher explains why his dogmatic affirmations are true. They probably are true. He has struggled with them all week in prayer and study. But instead of sharing the steps he went through to arrive at his conclusions, the preacher simply announces them. Usually the conclusion is announced in the title of the sermon and, if not there, at least the introduction tells all. To announce your conclusions in advance conspires against interest and attention, and if these are lost, the power of the gospel is frittered away.

In a sermon I heard recently, a preacher who ought to know better gave us his three points in the first minute of the sermon. They were all conclusions:

- I. All Persons Are Sinners
- II. God Hates Sin
- III. God Loves Sinners

What was left to tell? Why listen further? We know how the story ends. To announce your deductive conclusions ahead of time is like printing the solution to a mystery on page 1 of a novel. Who will read the other 300 pages?

More of the nature and strengths of induction is seen in these pairs:

Deduction announces truth—Induction demonstrates or dramatizes truth.

Deduction produces little suspense—Induction heightens suspense.

Deduction is frequently abstract—Induction is usually concrete.

Deduction is authoritative—induction is democratic.

Deduction paints with a large brush—Induction paints with a fine brush.

Deduction does the thinking for the hearer—Induction involves the hearer in the thought process.

Deduction starts with the conclusion—Induction delays the conclusion until the end.

Deduction tends to drive—Induction leads.

Deduction is that old saw, "Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them." Nothing could be more fatal to a sermon. Induction, on the other hand, is a finely crafted narrative as carefully tuned, as strongly plotted, and as powerful as the story of the Son of God born in a donkey stall.

Instead of the 19th century style of sermon that had "three deductive points and a poem," the notes to an inductive sermon will be more like a sketch of a story with the sermon moving from one scene to another with the new scene unfolding naturally out of the former one.

Principle No.2: Induction suits the new human sensorium.

When Christianity chewed up the Roman Empire, turning the world upside down with evangelistic fervor; the human sensorium was tuned to oral communication. It was a world controlled by classical rhetoric. Public address was the way of politics, of the judicial world, of democracy, of worship, and of evangelism.

In that time when the human sensorium (the way people perceived, understood, and communicated) focused primarily on aural (hearing) and oral (speaking) communication, the Early Church preachers changed the world. Many of the best: Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine, and apparently St. Paul, were trained in classical rhetorical theory—that force which swayed the destiny of nations and souls. This is still the starting place for preachers. If the classic canons—*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elecutio*, and *pronuntiatio*—are all Greek to you, much study awaits you like a father awaiting a son who is already four hours late.

With the invention of alphabetic script, movable type, and the printing press, that human sensorium changed. It became print-oriented. The written word became superior to the spoken word. If you wanted to say something important, you were told to "put it in writing." Preaching fell on hard times as sermons became literary

documents dreadingly read on Sunday and rushed off to the printer's on Monday. Bibliolators made the Bible into a "paper pope." Books and magazines were regarded as having more significance than a spoken sermon.

The print-oriented way of perceiving prevailed for centuries, but the print-oriented sensorium is gone. Oh, some of us are old enough to still be geared to print, but at least two generations of Americans now have an aural/oral/visual orientation. In this sense at least we are closer to the classical sensorium than before. This is good news for preaching, but there is one key difference. The classical oral/aural orientation was plugged into deductive thinking; today's new human sensorium is inductively oriented. Therefore, the preacher who would reach the minds and hearts of the modern generation must master inductive technique.

Two things have shaped the aural/oral/visual way of perceiving, understanding, and communicating. One is the televised image. The visual, visceral, aural, emotional, oral are combined in powerful experiences. Television's mode is inductive. Most of the commercials and, almost without exception, every adventure story, romance tale, and mystery show is inductively plotted. A story, a moral, sometimes a truth is dramatized (demonstrated) before the viewer's eyes. The viewers are not just told—they are shown. Only a deductive person will vote the "News Break" as his favorite program.

Typically, the people to whom we preach watch television as many hours each week as they work on their jobs. Every 30 or 60 minutes they are led to inductive conclusions.

The second major shaper of the new aural/oral sensorium is progressive education. Here again at least two generations have been educated by a system that deliberately aims at teaching students how to think, not what to think. Today's younger generations have been schooled by way of problem solving, values clarification, learn-by-doing exercises, study teams, critical inquiry, open-ended questions, and the like. All these have one thing in common—they are inductive devices. "A person who has been trained in this way is no more likely," says Ralph Lewis, "to let someone else chew... his Sunday dinner for him than he is to allow the preacher to do his thinking for him in the Sunday sermon" (*Inductive Preaching* Cross Way Books, 1983, p.46). The preacher may think with him (induction) not for him (deduction).

In their study time, work time, and leisure time, Americans live inductively. Fred B. Craddock says that the preacher who preaches only with neatly subdivided deductive syllogism today commits an immense crime against the normal currents of life (*As One Without Authority*, Abingdon, 1983, p.63).

The print-oriented past was the time of the deductively airtight lecture-sermon. Today induction must be considered, for has not Christ charged us to do whatever it takes to reach the people for whom He died?

So I must learn to use the tools and ingredients of induction. They are story, narrative, analogy, metaphor, parable, dialogue, experiences, and questions. But that is not so bad—that is the Bible way. The Bible is full of such devices. Many of the stories of Genesis are inductively plotted, the Psalms are filled with analogy and metaphor, the prophets tell stories about rotten fruit, plumb lines, and symbolic marriages gone bad and the like. Jesus used questions to preach and teach. He used dialogue. John alone preserves seven interviews of Jesus. And Jesus raised the

parable to new heights. Perhaps induction is the Bible way, God's way. The Incarnation itself is inductive in nature.

Principle No. 3: Induction increases the preacher's authority by decreasing it.

Today's inductive person is part of a democracy. Authoritarian approaches will be squarely challenged. Today's inductive thinker will be led but not pushed. Today, the preacher who comes out flinging "musts," "oughts," "shoulds," and "have tos" will be resisted or ignored. Induction is the method of common ground, vulnerability, and "let's," not "you." So by taking a less authoritarian stance the inductive preacher increases his authority-and the gospel's.

I have four more principles for which I do not have enough space. The other principles are:

Principle 4. Induction has a flesh-and blood reality about it because of its specificity and concreteness (the opposites of generality and abstraction).

Principle 5. Induction can make deduction more effective.

Principle 6. Induction cannot carry' the whole preaching task alone anymore than deduction can.

Principle 7. Inductive discourse may sound less scholarly, less weighty than deductive discourse, but this is frequently an Illusion.

If all this has "induced" you to desire further exploration of inductive preaching check out these books:

As One Without Authority, by Fred B. Craddock (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 3rd ed, 1983).

The Homiletical Plot, by Eugene L. Lowry (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980).

Inductive Preaching, by Ralph L. Lewis (Westchester; III.: Crossway Books, 1983).

What's A Nice God Like You Doing in a Place Like This, by Wesley Tracy (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1990). This book contains nine sermons which are narrative in style and deductive in structure.

In Lesson 10 we will listen to two sermons and discuss their structure and form. Read Resource 9-3, "Good Preaching Needs Good Structure," and be prepared to analyze these sermons in light of the principles presented here.

Lesson 10: Analyzing Sermon Form

Due This Lesson

Reading
Journal

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- recognize different sermon forms represented in sample sermons
- detect the moves and plot lines in a sermon

Homework Assignments

Complete your written summary of intent for your sermon.

Today in class we listened to two sermons representing two different sermon forms.

- Listen to the two additional sermons (CD) and complete the Listening Guides for each.
- Sermons can be listened to in small groups but the Listening Guides should be completed individually.

Journal Prompt

How does the preacher's personality influence his or her preferred sermon form? What form do you find the most effective? How do you select a form for your sermons?

Lesson 11: Writing the Sermon and Preparing to Preach

Due This Lesson

Sermon Listening Guides
Summary of intent

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- understand the process for writing the sermon
- define six qualities of a good sermon
- identify characteristics of effective speaking

Homework Assignments

Read *The Worship Plot* (Resource 11-5).

- Apply the principles to the sermon you are writing.
- Create a worship service for the sermon you are preparing.
- Be prepared to give an oral summation of *The Worship Plot*.

Begin writing your sermon.

Journal Prompt

What would listeners say about you as a preacher?

Six Qualities of a Good Sermon

Unity—it is specific, clear, and simple; it hangs together as one message

Memory—it knows who is listening to this sermon

Recognition—it says what we already know

Identification—it draws the listeners into the plot/story; it causes them to identify with the characters

Anticipation—it sustains interest and delays resolution

Intimacy—it cares, loves, respects, and trusts

Sermon Presentation Questions

1. Did the sermon have unity? What unifying theme held it together?
2. How did the sermon connect with the existing memory of the congregation?
3. What did the sermon say that you already knew? What did the sermon say that was new to you?
4. Where did you identify with the sermon? At what point did you connect?
5. Where was the suspense? Did the preacher keep your interest? How?
6. How did the preacher establish a sense of intimacy and nearness with the listeners?

Purpose of Writing a Sermon

1. It keeps the mind in focus and does not allow the preacher to wander.
2. It orders the material in some sequence and creates movement.
3. It allows you to look at each move and work on that move separately.
4. You can craft any sections of the sermon that need careful attention due to the possibility of misunderstanding.
5. You can rearrange the pieces should a different sermon form suggest itself in the process of writing.

Effective and Ineffective Public Speaking

Six characteristics of an ineffective speaker

- Monotonous voice
- Stiffness
- Lack of eye contact
- Fidgeting
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Weak voice

Five characteristics of an effective speaker

- Direct eye contact
- Alertness
- Enthusiasm
- Pleasant voice
- Physical activity

Six effective uses of the body

- Be relaxed
- Be definite
- Be appropriate
- Be yourself
- Use variety
- Adapt your movement to the audience

Ineffective uses of the body

- Random movement
- Nervous pacing
- Shifting weight
- Adjusting clothes
- Fiddling with keys, wallet, money, glasses, etc.

The Worship Plot

For Those Tired of Worship Wars

by Bill Bray and Dan Boone⁵

Preface

You are about to read a book written by friends. We work across the street from each other. Bill Bray is the chaplain of Olivet Nazarene University and Professor of Worship and Preaching. Dan Boone is the pastor of College Church of the Nazarene, Bourbonnais, IL, and visiting professor of Preaching and Pastoral Theology at Nazarene Theological Seminary. I can see Bill's office building from my office window. We are neighbors, but in more ways than our geographical proximity. We have each navigated the tumultuous waters of the worship wars—and have lived to write about it.

Our concerns are many. It concerns us when a pastor adds drums and drama, thinking he or she has gone contemporary. It concerns us when people argue over stylistic changes to worship without ever engaging significant theological questions. It concerns us when worship leaders import megachurch worship models without running it through the grid of their own history and theology. It concerns us that the future generation of worship leaders (now sitting in our classes, chapels, and congregation) has no strategy for leading their people to a place of understanding and unity in worship. It concerns us that undue energy is spent on in-house worship change to the detriment of outbound compassion, justice, and mercy. It concerns us when brothers and sisters retreat to the worship bunker of personal preference and begin to lob grenades at the opposing bunker of preference. It concerns us that the one event meant to celebrate our unity—common worship—is the event that fractures and splinters us. So, you can see, we have our concerns.

But we also have high hopes. The worship that occurs in our chapel and sanctuary is great worship. Not because we are brilliant, but because the people come to do the work of worship. And this work did not begin with our order of worship. It began in the heart of God as the self-emptying love known as Trinity. True worship is the fellowship of the Father who sends the Son who gives the Spirit. And even as this life flows to us, it flows back as the Spirit empowers the sacrifice of the Son on our behalf as an acceptable sacrifice to the Father. Trinitarian theology guides our understanding of worship. We are not creating something new, but rather stepping into a stream that began in the very heart of God.

We have written at a lay level, because we believe that worship belongs to the laity, the people of God. Worship is about their offering in Christ through the Spirit to the Father—not about a platform performance. It is our hope that this book will find its way to the battlefield where worship wars are currently being waged. We hope to lower the octane of the discussion and increase the meaning of the conversation. We offer this book as the gift of our shared experience in communities that care about

⁵ An unpublished manuscript by Bill Bray and Dan Boone. Used by permission of the authors.

worship. We have battle scars to authenticate our words. Maybe we can spare you a few of our wounds. But our highest hope is to join you and your people on a great journey of lifelong worship.

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Section One: Taking the Plot One Step at a Time

Chapter One

Entrance: Locating Ourselves

I knew I had been gone from home too long. I was on a five-week jaunt with several preaching assignments in several different locations. On this particular morning, I woke up in a strange room and couldn't remember where I was. The fog lifts slowly for me in the mornings. Add a couple of time zones, a different pillow, and strange surroundings, and I've got a fog that prohibits my mental facilities from liftoff. That morning, it took a few minutes for me to locate myself.

Knowing where we are is a primary part of knowing what we are supposed to do. When I figured out where I was—a bed and breakfast in Marion, Ohio—I had a clue about my day.

Entrance is the first move of worship, the first in a series of connect-the-dots moves that leads us into the Story of God. Entrance is knowing where we are, locating ourselves. Some label this move "Call to Worship." Others call it "Invocation." We call it "Entrance."

At the entrance of a home, a building, or a room, there is usually an indicator of where you are—a street sign, an address number, a room name or number. People who are looking for a place want to be assured that they have come to the right location. I looked past one of those entrance locators one time and wound up in a women's rest room—thankfully, vacant. We need locators at the entrance of worship that tell us where we are. Some of the locators are already in place.

LOCATION IN TIME

God's people are located in time by observing Sabbath. After six days of labor, we wake up on day seven and refuse to go to work. Only slaves work seven days a week. We know from the Exodus story that our slave days in the Goshen brick-making factory are over. God liberated us. As free children of God, we've been told to Sabbath. Every seven days we locate ourselves in time by resting. Long before God spoke about sacred place, He spoke of sacred time. "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done" (Gen 2:2, NRSV). And He called the day holy. God sanctified time by giving us Sabbath. In Christian tradition, we Sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week. We begin each new block of time by gathering to worship the God who liberated us from slavery. Sabbath is our entrance into the new week. By gathering in our sanctuaries, we recall who we are in time. We are the free people of God, filled by the Spirit, gathered for worship, sent into the world as Jesus is sent into the world.

LOCATION IN SPACE

The God who locates us in time also locates us in space. Abraham came to realize the value of holy places. He piled stones in a heap to mark the spot where God spoke to him. As God's free family grew, God gave instructions for a tabernacle. Holy place was sanctified in the middle of the camp. When God's family grew larger still, and settled in towns and cities, a temple followed. The Spirit-engine of the temple was the Holy of

Holies, the innermost shrine where the life-giving Spirit resided. The arrangement of the temple from outer court to inner shrine was designed to remind people of their location in the presence of a holy God.

Holy place fell into disarray with the idea that man could consign God to a location. People tried to keep God in a sanctuary, go see Him on Sabbath, then leave Him behind as they went out to live. God refuses to stay in His room. God is always moving out into the world and refuses to be managed or kept by His creatures. Stephen, in his New Testament noose speech, declares that God will not live in temples made by human hands. Stephen is suggesting that God's preferred temple is human hearts.

The architecture of our buildings can be a wonderful reminder to us that we are God's people. But beautiful architecture alone can never contain God. As we enter the Sunday morning sanctuary, we need to remember that we are a called-together people. God resides in the middle of the gathered church, not in the building. Place is made sacred as God lives along the people who gather there.

In April 2000, I was in Moscow working with Christian leaders. We toured several cathedrals in the Kremlin. As I entered these beautiful churches, my eyes were instantly drawn upward by the vivid color of the icons that adorned the room. The story of Jesus surrounded me in color, art, and beauty. The Orthodox Church, much better than Protestants, understands the need to engage our senses in the worship of God. I was sensually engaged in worship as I "read" the story of Christ in icon after icon. It was a moving experience. As I stood in the cathedral, I felt located. I knew where I was. A day later, I worshiped at Moscow First Church of the Nazarene. Fifty to sixty believers gathered on the upper floor of a rented building. The local grocery store was their neighbor in the three-store strip mall facility. Folding chairs were brought out. Portable instruments were brought in. Pulpit furniture was set up. And we began to worship. One woman testified to the transformation that had come into her life. She graciously thanked missionary Chuck Sunberg for coming to her city. He walked all the way to the back of the sanctuary where she stood. He embraced her. The beauty of Christ in that moment rivaled any icon I saw. God does not live in temples made with hands. He lives in the human heart.

How rich it is when our facilities are God-honoring in both ways—reminding us of our story in the beauty of the surroundings, and filled with people who are the temple of God's Spirit.

CENTERED IN TIME AND SPACE

We exist in time (Sabbath) and space (sanctuary) because God has called us to himself. He draws us together in time and space that our lives may be centered in Him. Without a center, life is fragmented. We don't know who or whose we are. We become slaves of technology who spend all our time at work. We become slaves of pleasure who spend all our time at play. We become slaves of boredom who spend all our time with mind-numbing television programs and computer games. Without God as our center, we are scattered in every direction without meaning or identity. We don't know who or where we are. Morning fog becomes life fog. We live in anxiety and fear. Life has no boundaries. We chase advertisements, seductions, and pagan pied pipers. We manipulate and are manipulated. We stuff our souls with numbing placebos. We are caught up in the latest diet fad, the newest car, the fastest

computer, the trendiest restaurant, or the hottest movie. Our life has no center. We are dislocated.

Imagine a life of gathering once every seven days in a familiar setting with the free people of God. Imagine a lifetime of being reminded who you are. Imagine a lifetime of centering and recentering your life in Christ. Entrance is the worship move that does this. Can't you hear it now?

"Good morning. This is Sunday, the Sabbath gift of God to us. We are free children of God. We are gathered in God's presence today because God, the same God who gives us work to do Monday through Saturday, this God has called us here. We are not in the workplace, therefore we can forget about needing to produce anything. We are not in front of a television, computer monitor, or movie screen; therefore, we can forget about being entertained. We are not in a classroom or lecture hall; therefore, we can cease our mastery of knowledge. We are in the presence of the God who longs and loves to set us free. God is up to good in our lives this morning. It is good that we are here."

We open our hymnals and begin to sing:

*We have come into His house and gathered in His name
to worship Him.*

*We have come into His house and gathered in His name
to worship Him.*

*We have come into His house and gathered in His name
to worship Him.*

Worship Him—Christ the Lord.

And why do we repeat the same line three times? Because it is hard for us to remember where we are in this world. We keep singing verses 2 and 3, which tell us:

*So forget about yourself and concentrate on Him
and worship Him.*

*Let us lift up holy hands and magnify His name
and worship Him.*

What are we doing? We are locating ourselves in the presence of God. We are entering His presence together.

We may go on and sing about standing on holy ground, or bringing a sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. Or we may follow the lead of those who have gone ahead of us in worship and read together from the Psalms:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 100, NRSV

The entrance move of the service can last 5-10 minutes. It can include an opening prayer (invocation), music, silence, scripture, a welcome. We often begin with worship videos combining scripture, nature scenes, and music. Use variety. Have a child walk onto a bare platform and tell people that God enjoys the playful worship of His people. Have a person from Russia or China remind the congregation that worship is a privilege not to be taken for granted. Think creatively about the opening moments of a service. These various elements are stitched together to call attention to the fact that we are in the presence of God.

As we move further into the five moves of the worship plot, it will become obvious that the bad news/good news moves will suggest the components of the entrance move. For instance, if the good news is that God can be counted on to keep His word, and the bad news is that we live in a world of broken promises and lies, then the entrance could locate us in the present of the God whose words are faithful and true. The worship leader might begin the service with:

“Good morning. Do you know anyone who has never lied, never fudged, never shaded the truth? If anyone comes to mind, you’ve probably seen a child of the God of truth. This reliable God has called us together this morning. We are in the presence of one who lives in broad daylight. God hates shadows where lies lurk and duplicity prowls. God is a straight shooter. What God says today may be hard to hear, but we can know it is true. Let’s open our hearts to the God who sees it and tells it like it is.”

Then we sing:

“Come, Thou Almighty King”:

*. . . come, and Thy people bless,
and give Thy word success . . .*

or “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place”:

*. . . my heart is leaning on the Word,
the written Word of God . . .”*

We read Psalm 19 and are reminded that God has spoken truthfully in both His creation and in His holy law. A prayer of thanks is offered to the God whose words are dependable. This sets us up to move into the bad news—that we live in a world of broken promises and lies.

Another example: Let’s say the good news is that God is no respecter of persons but offers grace freely to every creature. The bad news is that we live in a world of prejudice, favoritism, and preferential use of power. The entrance on this Sunday might sound like this:

“Good morning. Who in the world would God rather help than you? Who is above you on God’s totem pole of preference? Well, for those of you who think you’re low on God’s to-do list, I have good news. God loves all you creatures. And those of you who suspect that you are on the least likely list, God longs to convince you of His interest in you. We are in the presence of a God who offers grace to every creature.”

You stand and sing together and your voice joins with others:

*There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
Like the wideness of the sea:
There’s a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.*

*There is welcome for the sinner,
And more graces for the good.
There is mercy with the Savior;
There is healing in His blood.*

*For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.*

*If our love were but more simple,
We would take Him at His word;
And our lives would be illumined
By the presence of our Lord.*

Then we read from Psalm 103 that God knows what we are made of, that God has a Fatherlike compassion on His children, that God's steadfast love lasts forever. A child tells the congregation that her mother sometimes asks her if she knows how much she is loved. With arms stretched as wide as possible, the child answers, "This much. " Isn't it good to be gathered in the presence of a God who loves us "this much"? But then, not everyone in our world experiences such love—and you are into the bad news.

In shaping the Entrance, you work from the image of God that lies at the heart of the good news to be declared later in the service. A sermon on truth telling calls for an Entrance focusing on the God whose words are dependable. A sermon on favoritism calls for an Entrance focusing on the God whose arms are stretched wide in love. This means that the preacher must work far enough in advance to suggest Entrance themes to the musicians and service planners. Otherwise, people sit down to a Sunday morning potluck mystery soup.

Chapter Two The Bad News

As I write this, I am in Room 1522 of the Wyndham Emerald Green Plaza Hotel, San Diego. I'm here for a conference. This place has all the bells and whistles. The price tag for bells and whistles is \$181.63 a night. It goes against my southern Mississippi roots to lay out this kind of cash for a hotel room. I've paid less for a car. Simplicity feels a lot better in my soul than fancy hotels. My family thinks I'm extravagance-challenged. Being here causes me to look in the mirror and ask, "What's a guy like me doing in a place like this?"

We sit down in the church sanctuary and are located by the Entrance move. We find ourselves in the presence of a holy God, a sovereign God. This God knows us through and through. In the presence of this God, we tend to look at ourselves and ask, "What's a person like me doing in a place like this?"

I think Isaiah thought that. The angels located him with their singing. "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty . . ." As soon as he realized where he was, Isaiah cried out, "I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King" (Isa 6:5, NIV). Ruined. That was Isaiah's word for it. Not a bad word. We've called this "The Bad News."

Between this holy God and people like us, there is a gap. On our best Sundays, we still have sin sitting in the pews. Into the presence of this holy God, we bring our:

- grasping anxiety
- mouthy words about others
- attitudes toward authority
- marital frustrations and fissures
- prejudice
- tendency to nit-pick people raw
- festering wounds
- misuse of power
- bodily abuse
- selfish posturing
- lies of overestimation and flattery
- secret dark places
- preoccupation with image
- love of money

These things don't stick out in the world's shadowy lands, but put them under the blazing searchlight of the holiness of God, and they stick out like a Volkswagen on a Mercedes lot. This is why it must be made clear in the Entrance move that we have come into the presence of a holy God.

And if our personal hearts are clean and clear before God, which is the gift of the Spirit to those who are being sanctified, then our corporate hearts still need to confess. None of us has graduated from praying the Lord's Prayer. "Forgive us (corporately and personally) our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." In Isaiah's words, "I live among a people of unclean lips."

In America, we sit as citizens of a land where babies are aborted, the gap between the haves and the have nots is widening, the church is segregated, greed runs rampant, and entertainment is often dehumanizing. I could go on.

If our response is to say that this is the sin of others and that we are not responsible for it, we need a healthy dose of humility. Only when we confess these sinful behaviors will a watching world know how deeply we feel about the destination of God's creatures. We live as servants of Jesus in a sinful culture. The road dust of this world clings to our feet. We are not untouched by the evil around us. If we view ourselves as Christian escape artists who slither through the Monday-Saturday world, unfazed by its seduction and influence, we are only fooling ourselves. We must name the influences, behaviors, and powers that run a dark world. We must confess before God that we need cleansing, ongoing cleansing.

Beyond all this, there is a brokenness among us that must be brought before God. We have been hurt, lied to, taken advantage of, manipulated, raped, stabbed in the back, neglected, divorced, and robbed. What shall we do with this stuff? The world offers no place to take it. The church invites people to bring it with them and confess the brokenness to God.

By labeling this worship move "Bad News," we are saying that it is healthy to admit what is wrong in front of God. We can say right out loud that our lives aren't what we'd hoped they'd be. Or even more, what God wants them to be. We can admit that our society is on a downward moral slide. We can declare that we hurt deep inside. We can utter our sickness and grief, our failure and sin. We can admit what is bad about the world we live in. This worship move is what separates the publican from the sinner.

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted" (Lk 18: 10-14, NRSV).

The difference between the two lifestyles was obvious. But that is not the point of the parable. Jesus was calling attention to the fact that the Pharisee approached God by measuring the gap between himself and the tax collector, and offered the difference to God. The Pharisee recognized the superiority of his morality. And he was right. His ethics were higher. His morals were better. Given the choice between the Pharisee and tax collector, we'd much prefer to have the Pharisee as our roommate, next-door neighbor, or employee. Yet the Pharisee only registered disapproval in God's eyes. And the tax collector went home justified? Why? Simple. The Pharisee tended the gap between himself and the tax collector and thought himself righteous. The tax collector tended the gap between himself and God and saw his sin. Paying attention to the distance between God and us is a vital worship move. God honors humility and confession. God resists pride and posturing.

Among Nazarenes, this Bad News move is the hardest. We struggle with confession of sin. Our optimism about the radical nature of transforming grace makes it hard for us to be publicly honest about our sin. We feel like we're slipping into a casual

acceptance of sin if we confess weekly. So rather than confess weekly, we confess weakly. I would suggest that people being sanctified may have the best vantage point for confession. As our hearts are filled with love for God and humans, we are given God's eyes to see the destructiveness of sin in us and around us. As one dear saint confessed, "The closer I get to the holy God, the more my own shadows are exposed."

The Bad News worship move is vital to hearing the Good News. God comes to people who are broken. God appears in the middle of bad news. Look where Jesus went.

the tomb of a friend
the side of an adulterous woman circled by men with stoning on their minds
the table where sinners gathered
the unclean turf of a leper
the home of despised Zacchaeus
the bedside of a sick child
the Road to Emmaus with two who had lost hope

The Bad News is the opening through which God often comes into our life. When we gather and admit our Bad News, we are opened for the coming of God. Confession is the soul unlocked, opened for exploration by the divine helper.

Everything I've written so far about the Bad News might lead you to think this is something we must do for ourselves, something necessary for our peace of mind—like a good house cleaning or a soul catharsis. But to think this way would be disastrous. It misses the fundamental issue in Christian worship. To simply show up and think our role is to confess our sins and receive forgiveness is to rob Christian worship of its central character—Jesus.

When it comes to the Bad News, Jesus has taken our sin upon himself. Jesus stands as our High Priest offering the only acceptable sacrifice for our sin. Jesus represents us to God. Apart from Jesus:

we cannot confess
we cannot pray
we cannot offer ourselves to God
we have no mediator
we have no one who leads us to the throne of grace and the seat of mercy
we have no one who has died in our place and named our sin
we cannot worship

Jesus stands in our place, before God admitting our sin. Jesus is praying for us. Jesus is offering himself as our sacrifice.

"Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever" (Heb 7:25-28, NRSV).

"Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we

do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:14-16, NRSV).

As you plan this second move of the worship plot, be deeply conscious that the Christ who stands praying for us has already revealed the Bad News. He is the Spirit at the heart of our confession to God. This empties us of any wrongheaded thought that reconciliation to God was our idea or initiative. It begins and ends with Jesus.

MAKING THE BAD NEWS MOVE

This worship move can take many shapes. For years it existed in the form of prayer requests. People named out loud what needed divine attention, from the sick to the jobless to the lost. In many ways, this was one of the best things we did. It reminded us that the worship we were offering God was in the context of a needy world. It interrupted the clean flow of an antiseptic service that never came close to our real pain. We even gave place to "unspoken requests." We knew there were things so bad they couldn't be mentioned out loud. But when someone raised a hand or said, "I have an unspoken request, " we knew there was pain in the house. Bad news had come to the sanctuary that day. Worship meant something.

In many churches, the prayer request ritual has been exchanged for the open altar. We probably tired of the recital of everyone's sick list. In larger churches, this could take too long. The replacement for an out-loud naming of bad news was the invitation to kneel at a public altar during the prayer time, and bring our requests before God. The songs that invite us to come pray inform what we are doing.

*All your anxiety, all your care,
Bring to the mercy seat—leave it there.
Never a burden He cannot bear;
Never a friend like Jesus!*

Or,

*Come, Holy Spirit, I need You;
Come, sweet Spirit, I pray.
Come in Your strength and Your power;
Come in Your own gentle way.*

Many of the hymns we sing are prayers. These can be read together as petition. Try praying these hymns:

*"I Need Thee Every Hour"
"Open My Eyes, That I May See"
"Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart"*

In liturgical traditions, prayers of confession became a standard part of worship. The Book of Common Prayer offers these:

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.*

We are truly sorry and humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

In other services, the worship leader simply says, "Let us confess our sins to God." A time of silent prayer follows.

BUT DO HOLINESS FOLK CONFESS SIN?

I remember a theology class at Trevecca Nazarene University. A student asked Dr. Mildred Wynkoop, "Do sanctified people confess sin?" She paused for a moment, bowed her head and began to pray the Lord's Prayer. ". . . Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Then she looked up and said, "I don't think Christians ever graduate from praying the Lord's Prayer."

The Bad News move is hard on holiness folk. Prayers of confession may seem strange, but they are given to us throughout Scripture. David's prayer in Psalm 51 is the best known. But it is certainly not the only prayer of confession in Scripture. The cry for help extends from the Old Testament temple to the praying tax collector to the thief on the cross.

Confessional prayer is one way to make the Bad News move, but there are many other possibilities. I have found drama to be one of the most powerful. In a drama, it is possible to enact the Bad News. We see humans in front of us behaving badly. They make wrong choices. They say the wrong thing. They weave a web of sin. If the drama is done well, we are drawn into it. We identify with characters. We laugh or cry at ourselves. A drama resembles a parable by pulling us into a particular perspective. I find that open-ended dramas have the best effect. If everything is resolved in the drama, there is little left for the preacher to do with the Good News text. A drama opens us to the reality of Bad News and prepares us to hear the Good News.

Another way to get at the Bad News is an interview. In a service that dealt with the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Luke 8), we invited the local chief of police to tell us about the wildness in our community. Another time, in a service built around the commandment "Thou shalt not kill," we invited the mother of a murdered child to talk to us. It is hard for most churchgoers to feel the weight of this commandment. We normally end up talking about killing each other with words and looks. But after hearing the interview with this mother, we were open to the Good News of the commandment.

In many churches the Bad News move often creates a clash of values. I remember one time when we used a movie clip. The movie was well known in culture and had spawned phrases and values. The clip we selected contained no offensive words or scenes. It simply depicted a corporate executive defending the habit of greed. This executive made a moving, mesmerizing speech suggesting that greed is good. The audience in the movie gave him a standing ovation. That video clip was the Bad News move of the service. It followed an Entrance that had focused our attention on the self-emptying nature of God's love. The plot line of the worship was

Entrance: God is giving.

Bad News: The world believes greed is good.

The Good News: The radical grace of God moves us from greedy to generous.

Our people were brought face-to-face with the issue of greed in their economic world. They heard the dark speech that greed often makes in the recesses of their heart. Because we brought the world's finest argument into the sanctuary via video, and challenged it with a radically different perspective, they were confronted with the difference. The kingdom of God invaded the kingdom of darkness. Pre-Christians called us honest, relevant, and willing to deal with things that mattered. The prevenient grace of God was at work in their heart, opening them to being saved. But the response of several long-term believers could not have been more different. Anonymous cards said things like, "I suppose the staff watches movies all week to find this material." Or, "I have to see this type thing all week long. I come to church to get away from it." Or, "Doesn't it send a mixed message when we say on the one hand, 'be discerning in your entertainment choices,' and on the other hand, we show clips from movies?" Each of these is a legitimate question. We came back the following week and answered each question. "No, our staff doesn't sit around watching movies all week. We use a resource book, published by a Christian company, suggesting movie clips and contemporary songs on given themes." To the second question, "We all live in a world that features these things. We all tire of them. But the church is not an escape hatch or an enclave for saints. It is a gathering of people at the invitation of a holy God. We do not gather to escape the world, but to be cleansed of the world, filled with the Spirit, and sent into the world with an alternative kingdom to offer." And to the third question, "Yes, this could be construed as sending a mixed message. But over the long haul, we are consistent in challenging our people to make entertainment choices that refresh the soul, reflect God's heart, and restore us to vibrant life." (We had recently completed a five-week series on what Hollywood was doing to us.)

Prayer, confessional texts, drama, video clips—these are not the only ways to make the move.

- Send a person to the mall with a video camera and a question.
 - What do you hate?
 - What makes you worry?
 - What's the hardest thing about marriage?
 - What do you think about sin?Assemble the answers into a man-on-the-street video.
- Open the local newspaper and read an article about something that happened in your community.
- Project the words of a pop song, or play it. Allow it to become the voice of darkness that invades our cars, homes, and offices. Rather than letting it stand outside the sanctuary unchallenged, bring it before God for consideration.

The issues around contemporary expressions of the Bad News are volatile. The pastor has to be grounded in theological reality. Jesus stands in this move revealing something deeply wrong. This is not about entertainment, shock value, or being contemporary. It is about naming our sin as Jesus has revealed it. Pastors who do these things for shock value are dangerous.

Many congregations are not geared to handle a contemporary expression of the bad news. These congregations will probably not reach very far beyond their comfort zone, and will most likely be populated with people like them. Wise pastors will look for ways

to confess the bad news without starting a war. But this move cannot be omitted. If we think bad news never had a place among the worshiping people of God, we need to think again.

Read the lament Psalms. Try Psalms 79, 86, and 137. These are raw expressions of the bad news. Some of them recite the world's speeches. When's the last time you read those Psalms in church? These Psalms were worship moves.

Some congregations refuse to deal with bad news. If I have any critique for the praise and worship movement, it is the avoidance of the bad news. When all our songs are up and happy, the down and sad among us have no place to express how life is currently being experienced. People who've had a hard week stay home because they can't stand to be among all those happy people. The crowd of apparently successful Christians intimidates people who've failed. People with doubts are permitted no place to ask the same questions asked by Job, Peter, Mary, Thomas, and Jesus. In the Bad News move, we can question God as Job did. We can deal with our denials of Jesus as Peter did. We can say with Mary, "How can this be?" We can doubt right alongside Thomas. And we cry out with Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We do not chase the bad news away by refusing it a place of mention in our worship gatherings. We merely drive it underground to fester in the soul. When we name the bad news in the presence of God, we open ourselves to help.

The Bad News move can take 5-10 minutes, or longer if it bleeds into the opening of the sermon. Look for a congregational nod of recognition. This happens when the people collectively say, "This is true. Life in the world really is like that. And we wish it could be different." A congregation located (Entrance) in the presence of God, honest about the Bad News, is now in a good place to hear the gospel.

Chapter Three

The Good News

Here's where we shine! We love to declare good news.

"We're engaged!"

"Guess what! You're going to be a grandfather!"

"The tumor is benign."

"You have the job."

"We don't have to move."

"Yes, I'd love to go out on a date with you!"

Good news. We long to hear it. If it is credible, it changes us.

The Bible is full of good news. "I have heard your cry." "Let my people go." "You meant it for harm, but God meant it for good." "Forgive them." "The father ran to meet him." "Behold, I am coming soon."

Every one of these statements has a story. Every announcement of good news is made in the context of bad news. Can you imagine declaring to a lunch group, "I've got good news. It's benign." They would assume you were tested for cancer, or that someone close to you had received a report. Without a context of threatened disease, this good news makes no sense at all. This is why the bad news move is so critical to the announcement of good news.

For most congregations, the reading of Scripture and the sermon constitute the good news. These worship moves do not always end and begin clearly with service components. Sometimes the bad news bridges from a speech about greed into a story of a man who built bigger and bigger barns, or a tax collector who ripped people off. But halfway through these texts, the turn toward good news was made. Sometimes the opening five minutes of a sermon is all bad news. The preacher is analyzing sin and the people are agreeing. Good news is yet to come.

But finally, the good news arrives. Prophets eventually got to the good news. Jesus went from bad-news-town to bad-news-town preaching the gospel, literally, the good news. Paul went into the Gentile world (a bad news context) preaching the good news of the gospel of Jesus. A service in which the bad news dominates, or in which the good news never makes an appearance, is not a Christian service. Preaching is the declaration of the good news incarnated in Jesus, the one sent from God into a world that didn't know God.

Our worship is centered on God, informed by Scripture. The Entrance, Bad News, and Good News all sit down in front of the text for the day and ask key questions of the text. Entrance asks, "What is God like in this text? What is being revealed here about God?" Bad News asks, "How are humans in trouble? What has gone wrong here?" Good News asks, "What hope or help is being offered here? What gift is God giving? What is God up to?" The answers to these questions begin to guide our choices in constructing a worship experience for people.

As I was writing this chapter, I came to this point and wrote, "Gone are the days when people will show up to be harassed, harangued, and hamstrung by angry preachers wearing toe stomping holy boots." But I crossed it out. I don't think those days are

over. One of the characteristics of religious fundamentalism is an incessant focus on the bad news. People flock to sanctuaries to hear scathing condemnations of homosexuals and liberal politicians. They feed on anger against enemies—real and imagined. The service does not succeed, in their mind, unless the attack has been severe and thorough.

My fear is that these gatherings, repeated week after week, harden us in an anger that is deep, a lifestyle that is escapist, and a gospel that is mostly bad news. People who define good worship as “stomping on toes until it hurts,” need to take a fresh look at the ministry of Jesus. The only toes He consistently stepped on were those sandaled in religion.

I am not calling for a neglect of naming sin as sin, or an avoidance of the prophetic art of challenging the world’s ways. This is exactly what is done in the bad news move. I am calling for that radical transition somewhere around sermon time that smiles ear to ear and asks, “Would you like to know what God can do for people like us in a world like this?” The longer I pastor, the more I am convinced that people will attend churches that are honest about the bad news and excited about the good news.

We would tire of a medical doctor who went on and on about the nature of our disease, but never got to the cure. We would run out of patience with the auto mechanic who jabbered (at \$35 per hour) about the problem with our carburetor, but never talked about repair. We grow numb under preaching that drones on and on about sin in a dark world, but never gets to transforming grace.

Preaching the good news is basically vision casting. It is the God-called, God-inspired art of offering people a preferred picture of the future. We learn this from the prophets. They stood with one foot firmly planted in the mess of their day, and the other stepping into the tomorrow that God alone could create. They were vision casters. They offered a hopeful future to people mired in sin. They envisioned people healed, restored, forgiven, and cleansed.

Most of the stories of Scripture are cast in bad news/good news tension.

Bad News

We were slaves in Egypt
We are thirsty.
The prodigal left home.
I was blind.
She had bled for 12 years.

Once we were not a people.

Good News

God says, “Let my people go.”
“I am the water of life.”
The father ran out to meet him.
Now I see.
When she touched Jesus’ garment, she was healed.
Now we are the people of God.

Like a seesaw, these stories are carefully balanced with bad/good news. Give them each their due. Tell the whole story. And spend plenty of time on the good news.

TIMING THE SERVICE MOVES

How much weight do you give to each of these moves? In a one-hour worship gathering, how long should each take?

Entrance can take 5 to 10 minutes. The process of locating people in the presence of God should be long enough to celebrate the kind of God being revealed in the text that will be preached that morning. It should contain a heavy dose of the hospitality of God. People should have no doubt where they are.

The Bad News move can also take 5 to 10 minutes, or longer if it bleeds into the opening of the sermon. Get to the point. Look for the nod of congregational recognition that you have been truthful about the sinful condition of the world. Be honest.

The Good News move should begin within 20 to 25 minutes into the service, and should take 20 to 30 minutes. In most services, the sermon is the bulk of the service. And sadly, it is often disconnected from anything else that happens. By placing the sermon somewhere in the range of 20-minutes-after to 15-minutes-till, there is plenty of time for the last two worship moves—Response of the People and Blessing.

A service that has the preaching roaring to a screeching halt at the top of the hour, often cheats a congregation out of appropriate response. This is best remedied by attending to the first 20 minutes of the service rather than rushing the last minutes together.

Let's summarize. You've come into the presence of God in an entrance move that locates you. You've nodded in recognition that the news from our world is bad. You've heard what God, in Christ, has done to offer us freedom and hope. What next? You are ready to respond to the good news.

Chapter Four

The Response of the People

The doctor tells you the bad news. She explains the medical procedures for your illness. Now it's your turn. Responsibility is placed in your lap. Do you wish to be healed?

The mechanic lays out the problem. Suggests the repair. Estimates the cost. Now it's your turn. Yes or no? Fix it or drive an at-risk automobile.

A worship plot brings us to the place of response. This is not a response that we initiate, but one that we are made capable of by the activity of God. In recognizing where we are (Entrance), what is wrong (Bad News), and where hope lies (Good News), we have been opened by God to God for grace.

I am deeply indebted to Willow Creek Church and Bill Hybels, its founding pastor. From these good people, I learned how to sharpen the bad news/good news movements in a service. I learned issues of relevancy, honesty, seeing the world through lost eyes. However, the one issue I have with this movement is the label "seeker-sensitive." The primary seeker is God. We do not open our hearts to God of our own initiative. God opens us. God seeks us. God loves us. God is the active seeker in a service. In designing worship, we plot a way to go with God in search of lost and broken people. Rather than viewing humans as seeking after God, we view God seeking humans. Unless this distinctive is made, a service can be formed to manipulate human response. (I want to be very clear in saying that worship leaders at Willow Creek are not manipulative. The passion of God for lost people drives their choices. I only express concern that the "seeker-sensitive" label is more descriptive of God than people.)

This fourth move of the worship plot, the Response of the People, finds its cue in Scripture. In the same way we asked questions of the guiding text to determine the first three moves, we do the same here. We ask a text, "What human response is implied or desired in this text? What ought people to do in light of this good news?" The answer to these questions will suggest ways a congregation might respond to the gospel. This is not to limit our response in any way, but rather to enable people to respond verbally and bodily to God's gracious offer. The responses are many and varied.

- Repentance of sin
- Being baptized
- Anointing for healing
- Singing our commitment
- Volunteering for service
- Giving money
- Kneeling in submission to God
- Writing a note of encouragement
- Praying for sanctification
- Dedicating an infant
- Listening for God's voice of discernment regarding an issue
- Affirming another believer in a time of greeting
- Receiving the Lord's Supper
- Asking forgiveness of a spouse

Breaking bread
Washing feet
Praying for the sick
Making a decision and noting it on a card or sharing it with a fellow believer
Giving a public testimony

These are some of the ways we respond to the gospel. Rather than exiting the service at the end of a sermon, we move in obedience together. We model response. We are not people who listen to the Word and go away unchanged.

James calls us to response.

“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing” (Jas 1:22-25, NRSV).

Obedient response is the only appropriate response to the gospel.

As we hear the bad news and the good news, something is happening. We are either being hardened or being opened. The Word of God causes effect. Some are blinded, made deaf, and hardened in their hearts. Others are being saved. The Word of God does not allow us to remain neutral.

“Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account” (Heb 4:12-13, NRSV).

In the same chapter, the writer urges the people, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 4:7b, NRSV).

A human response will occur when the Word is preached. We do not need to manipulate that response. Contrived human response is a lack of confidence in the power of the Spirit who breathes out the Word. The cutting edge of the good news moves people off dead center. In one direction the heart grows colder and harder. In the other, we are opened to experience the grace of God in some measure.

As Wesleyans, our strong belief in prevenient grace leads us to recognize the activity of God in pre-Christians. It is possible for one who has not experienced conversion to experience the grace of God leading them toward life. In our services, we often ask people who have not become Christians to pray this prayer, “God, I am willing to be made aware of Your love for me. Open my eyes to see You at work in my life. Take away the blinders that have kept me in spiritual darkness. As yet, I do not believe, but I am willing to be opened to the possibility.” This prayer offers nonbelievers an opportunity to respond to the gospel in a way that moves them toward openness.

In considering the response of the people, it is important to offer everyone the opportunity to respond. If, Sunday after Sunday, the only way to publicly respond to the gospel is to go forward and pray at the altar, we excuse most of the congregation from response. We train 90% or more of the church that no response is needed.

One Sunday, our congregation was working on the issue of reconciliation with family members. The Entrance focused on the God of peace who brings all things together in Christ. The Bad News reminded us that the people closest to us often inflict life's deepest wounds. The Good News rose out of the story of Joseph, despised and sold into slavery by his brothers. The sermon title was "Outliving What Your Family Did to You." In a powerful scene of love and reconciliation, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and testifies to God's grace in his life. When we came to the Response of the People, it would have been easy to close the service with the suggestion that we all go make peace with those who had hurt us.

We took it a step closer. We provided paper and pens, and asked people to spend time writing a letter of reconciliation on the spot. They wrote to the music of the gentle prayer, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace." In receiving the offering, we reminded them that those who are deeply wounded tend to hold everything close as a defense mechanism. In giving, we are moving outward in a loving response. We urged people to celebrate what was happening as they released their grip on things into the offering plate. We sang "The Lord's Prayer," . . . forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. We exchanged greetings throughout the sanctuary, encouraging people to hand-deliver any letters to recipients present that day. We could have also offered bread to be broken during this greeting time.

When people hear the gospel and begin to respond immediately, the word takes root. Obedience becomes natural. When they hear it and walk away having done nothing, the chance of transformation is diminished.

"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold" (Mark 4: 3-20, NRSV).

The fruit of the word is wrapped up in the God-enabled response of the people.

When Jesus walked into bad news contexts to deliver good news, He called for response. "Follow me." "Come down. I'm going to eat with you." "Sell your possessions." "Forgive your brother from the heart." "Go and sin no more." "Repent and believe. The promise is for you." "Be baptized." "Eat the bread. Drink the cup. Remember me." "Go. Make disciples."

The good news calls for response. I am coming to believe that this response needs to be as sensual as possible. The more we taste, touch, see, feel, and hear, the more engaged we are in responding. Our bodies are capable of such response. We can love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. We have much to learn from other traditions. The sacramental churches can teach us to use bread, water, grape juice, oil, candles, incense, and rose petals. The Pentecostal traditions can teach us to use our hands, feet, and hips. The Quakers can teach us to get quiet and listen. The gospel calls for the most bodied-out response we are capable of. And the response fits the good news.

I grew up in southern camp meetings. The old Sartinsville Camp Meeting in Mississippi is a place of reverence in my memory. I think we were closer to this idea of human response then, than we are now. The sermon occupied the middle part of the service. After the sermon came a long invitation. The invitation was offered to the lost, to those seeking sanctification, to the sick, to the discouraged. Several different needs were addressed. Oil came out and people were anointed. Testimonies were shared. People clapped for the joy of victory. Others expressed thanks for seeing a long-term prayer answered. Love offerings were taken. People broke out in spontaneous choruses of praise. The response of the people often lasted for 30 to 60 minutes. While there is a lot about camp meeting days I do not wish to recover, the response of the people is one thing I'd love to bring back.

In the one-hour service, it is possible to plan for time to respond. If the sermon concludes no later than 15 minutes till the hour, there is time for prayer, offering, singing, and other responses. Congregational singing need not all be an Entrance move. Some songs are more meaningful as a Response of the People. Fifteen to twenty minutes of response makes the event participatory. This worship move rescues us from the tendency to entertain spectators. It asks something from those who come. It is liturgical, which means "the work of the people."

One final issue concerning the Response of the People. To whom is this response directed? Are we simply getting help for ourselves? Or are we responding to Jesus? The relational nature of the Trinity suggests that God calls us into rich relationship. If our response is simply a human move to get our needs met, we treat God as a vendor. True worship is a Christ-centered response of praise and worship. We are offering thanks to the Father through the Son by the Spirit. Our response takes many forms, but it is all thanksgiving to the God who saves us.

After hearts are joined in response to the good news, there is only one last thing to do.

Chapter Five

The Blessing

"You wanna know why I come to church?" she asked me. "Sure," I replied. "I come for the blessing. When you raise your hands at the end of the service and say those good words, well . . . it's the only time something like that happens to me during the week. Everywhere else I get dumped on. When you bless us, I feel like I can live the next week."

I'll never forget that conversation. The young woman was right. Blessing is what we call it. Benediction. Good words. And it doesn't take long. Maybe two minutes max. But it is important. We send the people of God into the world under the blessing of God. We depart to serve under the smile and favor of God. We are invigorated by the Spirit of God. We are going out where Jesus goes. We are children of the Father. The Trinity is at work in us.

Most of the New Testament letters end with blessing. Hebrews concludes by saying: "Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb 13:20-21, NRSV).

Philippians ends:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Phil 4:23, NRSV).

Paul's second letter to Corinth concludes with:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor 13:13, NRSV).

Other commonly used scriptural blessings are printed in hymnals. Some can be sung to or by the people: "The Lord Bless You and Keep You," "Sent Forth by God's Blessing," "Forth in the Peace of Christ We Go," "God Be with You."

The scripture text for the day may contain a blessing waiting to be discovered. In the service on reconciling with a family member who has wronged you, we allowed people to write letters of reconciling peace. The benediction for the morning was, "May the Spirit of God accompany your words of peace to the heart of one estranged. May the presence of Jesus come alongside during its reading. And may the Father make of us brothers and sisters, members of one family. Go in peace."

The Blessing is empowering. It reminds people that God is at work in their response and will be at work in their world. It gives boldness to beaten-down people. It whispers gracious words to those who hear grumbling all week long. It invades damaged esteem with Creator value. It counters the curses of the world.

In Scripture, a blessing is words with power inherent to do good. A curse is words with power inherent to do harm. The world curses us. The world speaks to us in ways that steal, kill, and destroy. The world's words manipulate us for selfish gain. God's words of blessing counter the curse.

It may seem a small thing to do, but God moves in a blessing upon His people.

May the God who gathers us for worship, grant you grace to lead His people into their story.

Chapter Six

Encountering the Resurrected Christ

(a.k.a., “What Christians Do Every Lord’s Day”)

There’s an amazing story in the New Testament that can help us visualize the five moves of the Worship Plot. It’s the story of two discouraged disciples—possibly husband and wife—returning home that first Easter morning. We’ll call it “Encountering the Resurrected Christ”—(also known as)—“What Christians Do Every Lord’s Day.” It is very possible that the writer Luke wanted his readers to see the parallels between the events of that day and what happens every Lord’s Day, when Christians gather for worship. The story is recorded in Luke 24: 13-35 (NRSV).

“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ Then he [Jesus] said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

“As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

THE GATHERING OR ENTRANCE (Jesus comes to walk with them)

Significantly, Jesus initiates this encounter and conversation. Here's a powerful and beautiful image of God's initiating grace that calls and enables our worship. The two travelers were privy to the breaking news about an empty tomb, but couldn't make sense of it. It was all too confusing. They were simply and sadly brokenhearted. Into this mood of devastation and resignation strides the resurrected Christ. But they didn't recognize Him. Why? Was their grief so acute that their senses were dulled? Were their senses supernaturally dulled? Was it a combination of sun and shadows? We don't know. Just that they didn't recognize Him.

Similarly, we gather for worship every Lord's Day. And, as every worshiper knows, some Lord's Days are easier than others. Sometimes we're not like those two disciples at all. We come into worship ready, and fully expecting to meet the resurrected Christ. Other times we are very much like the two travelers. We hurt. Either way, the resurrected Christ joins us whether or not we recognize Him.

THE BAD NEWS (They had hoped Jesus was the One)

"But we had hoped" (verse 21). Four words that speak volumes about life's disappointments. They had hoped Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. They had hoped Jesus would lead a military effort against the Romans. They had hoped Jesus would establish a political kingdom of God. Instead, they didn't get what they hoped for. The Conqueror had been conquered. The Deliverer had not delivered. The Cross spelled defeat. The Cross meant despair.

Chances are that you too carry around a life script as to how things should turn out. Things like family, education, relationships, money, health, and work are just a few of the components of that script. Perhaps parts of your script have been realized. Perhaps other, more significant parts of our script have not been realized. Perhaps your script is not turning out at all like it should. And, like the two travelers that day, "you too had hoped."

The Bad News move of worship puts us in touch with these hurts—and for that reason, is often omitted. The truth is, sometimes we bring the Bad News with us into worship. Sometimes the Bad News becomes apparent as it's contrasted with the presence of Holy Love in the Gathering—like the opening verses of Isaiah 6, or Revelation 5. Sometimes the Bad News becomes apparent in the development of the Good News phase of worship. Oftentimes it's all the above. Fortunately, Bad News is only a part of the Worship Plot. There is also Good News, Response, and Blessing.

THE GOOD NEWS (Jesus explained to them the scriptures)

As the two travelers stood toe-to-toe with their hurts, Jesus began proclaiming good news. "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (verse 27). Basically, Jesus told them The Story. He told them the Story of salvation history. He told them the Story of God—preliminarily revealed in the events of the Old Testament but now ultimately revealed in His own coming. We know Jesus' words had great impact because later "they said

to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' (verse 32)

In this third move of Christian worship, the clue to resolution is proclaimed. Indeed, the Good News of resolution is proclaimed. This Good News may be sung, enacted, or projected, but it's most often read and preached. When this happens, even when Scripture is read poorly and badly preached (which is no excuse for poor quality) the Word of God still proclaims and is proclaimed. The stage is set for the resolution of the worship drama—Response. Unfortunately, many worship services place the sermon so late in the service that there's little or no time for Response to the Good News. When this happens, it might well be analogous to leaving the game at halftime or the play at intermission. We never experience the resolution of the drama. That resolution is the fourth move of worship.

RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE (They invited Jesus to stay with them)

The disciples had a decision to make. They could let Him go or they could invite Him to stay. Because we already know the impact Jesus' words had on them (verse 32), they invited Him to stay. Because it was toward evening, this included eating supper together. Sitting down together at the table, there was something recognizable about His actions. The guest became the Host. He took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and then gave it to the two hosts-turned-guests at the table—exactly as He had done three days earlier on the eve of His crucifixion. In that moment, "Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (verse 31). Later, when recounting the experience to the other disciples, they admitted "how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (verse 35).

How often does Christ go unrecognized in our worship because there is no Response—or even time for Response—to the Good News? How often does Christ go unrecognized in our worship because there is no Supper, no Communion, no Eucharist Thanksgiving—with or without the actual table? How often does Christ go unrecognized in our worship because there is no fourth move to the Worship Plot? Response! Instead, we often move quickly and thoughtlessly from sermon to dismissal, without realizing that it's not only in the Good News phase of worship that Christ is experienced but in the Response phase of worship too that eyes are opened, needs are met, and Christ is praised. The truth is, it is this Response phase of worship—with its roots in the Last Supper and Upper Room—that is uniquely Christian.

THE BLESSING/DISMISSAL (They immediately told others what happened)

Their excitement was uncontrollable. Despite the lateness of the hour, they immediately ran back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. Upon arrival, they told a story about a road, a stranger, a meal—and the Resurrected Christ. No longer were they lamenting, "But we had hoped."

This fifth and final move of Christian worship is a no-brainer. We gather, then we scatter. We go out from formal, gathered worship to continue our worship as lifestyle. We witness to this Living Lord—which is our "spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1).

Could one imagine a more powerful depiction of Christian worship than Luke 24?

Chapter Seven Samples

The people from Missouri are known to say, "Show me." In this chapter, I want to walk you through a three-week series done at College Church of the Nazarene, Bourbonnais, IL, in October 2000. The first Sunday is fully developed—drama, sermon, and script. The second week is an abbreviated worship plot. The third week is a picture of a working service plot eight weeks prior to the service. The theme of the series is "Holy Habits Rarely Seen." The texts are drawn from the Gospel of Luke. We looked at the kind of things Jesus did in public ministry that are rarely done by His people today. These include eating with unlikely people, exorcism, and tending to the gap between us and God.

These themes were developed in August 2000. Musicians and dramatists had 10 weeks to work on the plot line of the service. Linda Stone, a volunteer in our drama ministry, wrote most of the dramas. Some of the humor in the dramas is local. When we use drama from Lillenas or Zondervan, we try to rescript it with a local flair. One of the weaknesses of printed services and sermons is the absence of context. In a word, you'd have to have been there. We have learned not to import drama or sermon from other sources without running it through our local context grid. This unmasks my bias against sermons that are bought, borrowed, or begged from other sources. Sterile outlines in a magazine begin in another world, not the world of that worshipping congregation. Homecooked sermons lend themselves to home-cooked services, which fit the ethos and appetite of the home crowd.

Welcome to College Church. It's October 2000. We are enjoying fall weather. The Olympics are going on in Sydney, Australia. The presidential race between Gore and Bush is heated. We are working on launching a fourth weekend service at a different location. This service will be interracial. Our Faith Promise commitment Sunday is five weeks away. The church is healthy and growing. This is a good season to challenge our people to stretch.

Week One HOLY HABITS RARELY SEEN: EATING WITH UNLIKELY PEOPLE

Entrance

As you come into the sanctuary, you hear Jerry Luzeniecki playing his saxophone, accompanied by the band. It's a Dixieland rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In." You find yourself in a toe-tapping mood. Someone steps to center stage and says, "Good morning. What a great thought. . . to be included in the crowd that goes marching into heaven. I want to be in that number when the saints go marching in. They are headed to a banquet. And when it comes to mealtime, no one wants to be left out. It's our hope that our visitors don't feel left out this morning. You'll find a visitor's card in the pew rack in front of you. If you'd like more information about the life and ministries of College Church, fill that out and drop it in the offering plate when it passes. We don't expect that you came prepared to participate in the offering, so feel free to take a pass. Just drop the card in the plate. We promise not to put you on an eternal mailing list. We only want to deliver a packet of information designed to

introduce you to us. We are learning to be hospitable and inclusive. God is our teacher. He loves everybody. We're glad you're here."

The music team is already in place. Our music leader invites people to stand and sing. We sing about the love of God for all His creatures. In our contemporary service we sing "His Love Reaches," "It's the Sweet, Sweet, Sweet Presence of Jesus," and "Think About His Love." In a more traditional service we sing "The Love of God," "Such Love," and "Think About His Love." The songs focus us on the inclusive heart of God. A prayer is offered thanking God for grace extended to people like us. Before people are seated, they greet those around them.

Bad News

As people are greeting each other, the platform is set for the drama. The setting is two tables. At one table, three people wrestle with life issues. They have no faith or understanding of God's grace toward them. At the other table, three believers talk about life issues from the perspective of their faith. The conversation and spotlight shift from one table to the other sequentially. You find yourself wishing that these people could eat together. The drama ends with each group meeting at the trashcan in the center. You realize that these people work together every day and eat in the same lunchroom. But they never mix company over a meal.

"Table for Six"* **by Linda Stone**

Holy Habits Rarely Seen: Eating with Unlikely People

Scene: Two tables with three people at each. They're eating lunch. Some of them brown-bagged. The Christians sit at one table, the riffraff (just kidding) at the other. (I tried to give them fairly genderless names to make casting a little easier, but some lines might have to be changed.)

Table 1—Christians

Chris
Robin
Dana

Table 2—Non-Christians

Phil/Phyllis
Sam/Samantha
Gene/Jean

Lights up on Table 1

Chris: (sighs) Another Monday. (starts opening Tupperware)

Robin: It sure is. You brought lunch? You're ambitious. What is it?

Chris: Leftover Sunday pot roast, of course. And it's not ambition, it's end-of-the-month poverty.

Dana: Wow, you guys still have pot roast on Sundays?

Chris: Just like Mom used to make.

Robin: Dinner at your house next week! We had peanut butter and jelly.

Chris: On a Sunday?

Robin: Yeah. By the time we got home from church, that's all I had time for. We had promised my mother-in-law we'd bring the kids over to rake leaves in the afternoon.

Dana: How's she doing?

Robin: Better. She has a lot of friends from church who are keeping her busy. I know she still misses my father-in-law like crazy, but at least she's not home alone too much.

Dana: They say that it's the weeks and months after the funeral, when life gets quiet again, that are the hardest.

Robin: She and my father-in-law were on a lot of people's prayer lists in the months before he died, and those people are still there for her.

Chris: I don't know how people do it, without the grace of God and the support of Christian friends. Some people face death without a clue that God even exists. I don't know how they make it.

Dana: (shaking head) I don't either.

Lights out on Table 1, up on Table 2

Phil: So, how was everybody's weekend?

Gene: Too short as usual.

Sam: Mine was too long.

Phil: I didn't know that was possible.

Sam: It is if you're at a funeral.

Phil: Oh, I'm sorry. Who was it?

Sam: My wife's cousin. She died in an accident. The whole family is pretty torn up.

Gene: Did you spend the whole weekend with them, then?

Sam: Pretty much; had some out-of-town relatives staying with us. We had to split them up—you know, somebody's not speaking to somebody else, this one hurt that one's feelings 10 years ago. As if the reason we were all there wasn't bad enough. (pauses) What I wouldn't give to have seen a friendly face around there.

Phil: How old was the cousin?

Sam: She was 35.

Gene: Man. Really makes you think.

Sam: Yep. Sure does. My wife is taking it pretty bad. She and her cousin were pretty close—like sisters. And I don't know how to help her. She's been really quiet—too quiet. When she does talk to me she has all these questions about life . . . I mean, what am I supposed to say? I sure don't have the answers. (shakes his head) 35!

Phil: 35. I guess you never know, huh?

Sam: (slowly, thoughtfully) Nope . . . you never do.

Lights out on Table 2, up on Table 1

Robin: Well, I didn't know Monday lunch was going to turn out to be testimony time, but I have to tell you guys something. I found out Saturday that my sister and her husband are getting back together.

Dana: Really? I never thought that would happen!

Chris: Why? What's the story on your sister?

Robin: She and her husband have been separated for over a year. Very bitter divorce in the works—the only thing holding it up was the question of custody—neither of them wanted to hurt the kids.

Chris: And now they're getting back together?

Robin: Yes. They started going to counseling to work on helping the kids deal with the divorce, and ended up deciding maybe it wasn't over after all.

Dana: Wow. God really does answer prayer. You were praying for them long before they split up—I think you knew they were in trouble before they did.

Robin: It's nothing short of a miracle. And they'd be the first ones to admit it was God at work in their lives. This was not something they figured out how to fix on their own.

Dana: (to Chris) She's not kidding. You should have seen these two. Once they had a shouting match out in front of Robin's house.

Lights out on Table 1, up on Table 2

Gene: So then my wife tells him she can go out. After I just told him he was grounded. She thinks I'm too hard on him, I think she's too soft. I'm telling you, this kid is pushing us apart!

Phil: And he's probably making the most of it. They're experts at that age. Divide and conquer.

Gene: Tell me about it. I don't think we'll ever even argue once that kid is out of the house. If we make it that long.

Sam: Hang in there. About the time they turn human again, they leave.

Phil: Tell that to my 25-year-old daughter.

Gene: Aw, I don't even want to hear that.

Phil: It's not so bad. With her around, my wife has someone to shop with. I haven't had to go to the mall in years.

Gene: I get so desperate for peace and quiet, I'd even be willing to go to the mall with my wife. But I don't think she'd want me to. Sometimes I'm afraid we don't have anything in common anymore. Or won't once the kids are gone.

Sam: Is it really that bad?

Gene: Well . . . remember a few weeks ago when she went to Michigan for the weekend? The weekend stretched into two weeks and I, uh . . . I wasn't sure she was coming home. And she wasn't sure either.

Phil: But she did come back.

Gene: Yeah, she's there, but . . . (looks like he wants to say more, but just shakes his head)

Sam: Maybe you two should talk to somebody.

Gene: (reluctant) I don't know, maybe . . . I wouldn't know where to start. I mean, who wants to listen to someone else's marriage problems?

Lights out on Table 2, up on Table 1

Chris: There have been a lot of times when I didn't know how we'd get through something, but God really does give you the grace when you need it, and not ahead of time.

Dana: True. Sometimes I wish . . . (hesitates)

Robin: What? Go ahead . . .

Dana: Well, I don't want to sound like I know it all, but sometimes I wish there was a way for me to share what I've learned. I'd really like to help people going through hard times.

Chris: I'm sure they'd let you take a Sunday School class, or even some kind of support group.

Robin: But see, there you'd be, still in the church. Sometimes I feel like our lives revolve so much around church activities that I don't even know anybody who's not a Christian.

Dana: I know what you mean. All our friends are there, it seems like we spend every weekend there, the kids are involved . . .

Lights go up on both tables. Dana and Gene say simultaneously . . .

Gene & Dana: I just wish I knew who to talk to about it.

(Everybody starts looking at their watches, somebody says that it's one o'clock and they'd better get back to work. All six rise and start putting their trash in the same

trash can, nodding hello to each other, etc., and we realize (hopefully) that they all work at the same place, and are together every day.) Lights out!

Good News: Sermon

Of all the places habits can be observed, the dinner table may be the best. Eating reveals our habits. Where we sit. Saying grace. Pass the salt, please. Using the correct fork. Smacking your lips. Interrupting. Lecturing. Placing your napkin in your lap. Eating reveals habits.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus comes strolling into a world made new by His presence. He sees things differently. He behaves differently. His habits shatter the prevailing culture. He has habits rarely seen. And of all the possible places to introduce new habits, Jesus chooses the table.

Julia Childs wouldn't have done what He did.

Gloria Vanderbilt wouldn't have done what He did.

The truth is, we are very hesitant to do what He did.

What did He do? Well, to understand that, I'll need to tell you a little about meals and tables in Luke's day. There were four rules.

1. Meals were the way you managed the boundaries of your life. On normal days, your family gathered at your table. On special occasions you might extend the boundary to include others. Via meal invitations, you declared who belonged and who didn't. Rule 1 sounds familiar.
2. Where you sat at a meal ranked you socially. As a guest at a meal, the closer you sat to the host, the higher your status. The further you sat from the host, the lower your status. You could tell the pecking order of the community by observing the seating pattern. Rule 2 isn't so strange to us either. I remember hearing one of our daughters arranging the seating for her birthday party. Best friends near. Barely invited friends, down at the other end of the table. And who among us doesn't try to arrive early at open seating banquets. We don't want to get stuck eating with unimportant people all evening.
3. Meals were meant to be reciprocated. You invite me, I am obligated to return the favor. It isn't a courtesy, it's a must. So this means that I am going to be very careful about accepting an invitation from you because, after all, do I really want to reciprocate?
4. You only invited people who could affirm or improve your social standing. Your "A" list included people who were higher than you in social standing. It took courage to invite them because they might refuse your invitation due to the obligation to invite you back. Your "B" list included people who were on your level. This was a safe ask. Your "C" list was comprised of people you wouldn't think of inviting. They would drag you down.

Now, it would be easy to throw rocks at these rules, but this is just how it was. People were picky about table guests. People preferred the better seats. People excused themselves from invitations that obligated them. People thought of each other in pecking order fashion. Into that world, Jesus comes walking.

"On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. Just then, in front

of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, 'Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?' But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, 'If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?' And they could not reply to this" (Lk 14:1-6, NRSV).

Apparently Jesus had taught in the synagogue on Sabbath. He was a visitor en route to Jerusalem. The leading Pharisee thought Him worth the risk of a dinner invitation. But being the new guy, the Pharisees were watching Him closely. On the way to dinner, Jesus came face-to-face with a bloated man. His body was retaining too much fluid. The curse of dropsy is an insatiable craving for water coupled with the inability to void the water. This guy is killing himself with fluid and his body is screaming for more. He craves the very thing he already has too much of. Jesus asks permission to heal him. The dinner party is dumbfounded. Not a word of reply. Jesus healed him and sent him home, explaining that they would have done the same for a cow or a kid. Again, no reply. But I'm guessing they were thinking bad things about their dinner guest.

"When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Lk 14:7-11, NRSV).

They had been watching Jesus to see what He would do. Now Jesus watches them scramble for the best seats in the house. They probably remind Jesus of the bloated man—an insatiable thirst for what they already had plenty of. They were bloated with status and didn't know how to void themselves of it. Their body screamed for more. They wanted the seat of honor worse than the sick man wanted a drink. Jesus, being an equal opportunity healer, offered a cure. Take the worst seat in the house. Instead of testing the pecking order, take the risk of humility. Accept your status as a gift from the host. Hope that the host will "call you up."

All through Luke's Gospel, God does this—calls people up. From low to high. From down to up. From last to first. Jesus is suggesting a new dining habit. Rather than vying for status, receive it as the free gift of God.

If you are thinking about saying "Amen" right here, think twice. Are we really ready to embrace this habit? We compete with each other for place. Not everyone stands on the medal podium in Sydney. Only one person will be elected president. Not everyone gets promoted. There are bell curves. GPAs separate us. At graduation there are three kinds of laudes. In tournaments, you hope for first, second, or third places. Miss America is chosen from 50, then 10, then 5 . . . and nobody remembers the runner-up. We have income brackets and social standings. You don't get far in this world by willingly taking last place. The Chicago Cubs have tried this for years and no one ever invites them to the World Series. They don't get called up.

What Jesus is suggesting is social suicide. He is out of step with the way our culture operates. His table habit would make everyone in their right mind think He had lost His. But then, could this really cure dropsy? Could it cure the thirst for status that bloats us? Could we survive by receiving honor as a gift rather than wrenching it from each other? It's worth a thought.

As our text continues, you'll see that Jesus is an equal opportunity offender. Having addressed the guests about their game of "power musical chairs," He now turns to talk to the host about the guest list.

"He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'" (Lk 14:12-14, NRSV).

Have you ever had the audacity to tell your host that he invited the wrong people to dinner? Jesus suggests to the host that he scrap his "A" list, his "B" list, and go straight to his "Z" list. The "Z" list doesn't even exist in the host's imagination. The poor, crippled, lame, and blind aren't on anyone's list. They can't add to your status. They cost you points. They can't pay you back. Inviting them would be pure mercy.

You may be thinking about saying "Amen" right here, but think twice. Our world doesn't work this way.

- Financial planners don't work a crowd of bums.
- College professors don't have coffee with high school dropouts.
- Coaches don't frequent hospitals looking for recruits.
- Graduating college students don't list jobless people as references.
- Pastors don't inquire about an opening at a small church full of needy people.
- Doctors don't open a practice in the blighted area of town.

We connect with the people who can help us. We rarely lower the boundaries of our life to people who have absolutely nothing to contribute to who we are. This habit would go unrewarded everywhere in the world . . . with the exception of the resurrection of the righteous.

Apparently, one of the dinner guests wants to change the drift of the conversation. Jesus' talk about a resurrection of the righteous reminds him of a saying.

"One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' Then Jesus said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the same time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to the slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner'" (Lk 14:15-24, NRSV)

The unthinkable has happened. An important man has sent out invitations for a great dinner, and all the guests are excusing themselves. This is a social disaster. With each RSVP, his status stock is plummeting. The invitees are wrenching from the host his dignity and standing in the community. It is social assassination. What is the host to do?

Maybe he tries out Jesus' new dinner habits. Invite the "Z" list—the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. But you'll have to bring them. They won't come on their own. You'll have to convince them they're invited. They won't believe their ears. They'll think it's a cruel joke and they're being set up for a shaming. You'll have to compel them, because they know they can't reciprocate your invitation. What's that? There's still room at the table?

Response of the People

(The pastor walks to the Communion table, beautifully decorated with bread, grapes, and chalice.)

And this brings us to this Communion table. How did you (looking inquisitively at the gathered congregation) get on the invitation list? I know you. You are not righteous enough to merit an invitation. You can't improve God's social standing. People like you will cost God points if word gets out that you were on the list. And there are no seats around this table. How will we know who is important here? And how will we reciprocate God for this invitation? Can we produce a meal that equals this one? I see "Z" list people sitting here this morning. Some of you are probably shocked to discover your name on the list. It comes as a surprise to you that this is no cruel joke. God really does mean to include you in His banquet. It is His intent that you be in that number when the saints go marching in.

Too good to be true? Yes. Any requirements? Yes. Two meal rules.

1. You must come hungry, open to receive life as the free gift of God. This is not something you earned.
2. You must be breathing.

Let's bow to say grace.

"Gracious God, these are Your gifts to Your people. The body and blood of Your Son, Jesus, is our life. We come to this table having examined ourselves in the light of Your grace. We are needy. We are hungry. We are open for the forgiveness, healing, and cleansing that comes from fellowship with You at this table. Bless this food to the nourishment of our body and soul. Amen."

As a worshiper, you are invited to stand and come forward to a central table at the front. You are with other believers gathered around three sides of the table as you take the bread and cup. You eat and drink, looking into the faces of fellow worshipers. (This takes 10-15 minutes for everyone to come to the table and eat. During this time, you are singing "Make Us One, Lord," "The Servant Song," "Give Thanks," "You Are My All in All," "Let Us Break Bread Together.")

Blessing

How do we reciprocate such a gift? By going from this table to live in the grace and acceptance of God. By eating with the unlikely people of our world. By extending our

table boundaries to include anyone God directs us to. By remembering how it feels to be included in the kingdom of grace.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be with you at each meal and open your eyes to His presence. The Lord make holy the tables throughout this county in the week to come. Amen.

Week Two
HOLY HABITS RARELY SEEN:
EXORCISM

The text of this service is Luke 8:22-39. It is the story of Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac. We invited the public servants of our county to attend this service as our guests. Letters went out weeks in advance. We encouraged our people to invite police officers, social workers, AA leaders, hospital emergency room personnel . . . anyone whose work placed them face-to-face with evil in its most blatant and violent forms.

Entrance

Opening songs focused on the power of God. In our contemporary service, we sang "Jesus, Mighty God," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and "Praise the Name of Jesus." In our traditional service we sang "Come, Thou Almighty King", "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and "Crown Him King of Kings." Words of welcome were spoken to our guests and a prayer was offered on behalf of those who deal with the darkest side of life in our community.

Bad News

We watched a five-minute video clip from the movie *Grand Canyon*. (Note: if you use video clips, it is imperative that you own the license which permits such use, or that you get permission from the producers of the film.) In this clip a man's car has broken down late at night in the inner city. He calls a tow truck whose driver arrives at the same time a gang begins to harass him. The tow truck operator and the gang leader have a discussion about their roles. The gang wants to be unhindered in robbing the driver. The tow truck operator wants the gang to leave and let him do his job. The gang leader has a gun and makes the point that respect is gained only at the point of a gun. The operator of the tow truck speaks the pivotal line in the scene—"Man, it's not supposed to be this way." The congregation has seen a picture of a dark, threatening world.

The preacher walks to the pulpit and opens the local Sunday morning paper. He or she reads the dark news headlines from the community. Shootings. Robberies. Crowded jails. Child abuse. The Bad News laps over into the beginning of the sermon as the preacher continues.

When I read these kinds of things, it makes me want to run and hide. But that raises the question, Who will face this evil? I find myself thinking about
a police officer that knocks on the door of domestic violence
the social worker that sits across the table from a child abuser
a teacher face-to-face with an angry student
an emergency room team treating opposing gang members
a public defender in a cold courtroom
an undercover drug agent making a bust

the counselor of a client who has purchased a gun
a prison guard breaking up a fight with no one watching his back.

These people can't run. It's their job. They face evil daily in its rawest, deadliest forms.

Good News

Have you ever wondered what Jesus might mean to these public servants? Listen to this story from the Gospel of Luke.

Preacher reads Luke 8:22-39.

The geography of the story is simple. The lake is in the middle. On one side of the lake is the safe, religious world of the Jews. The comfort zone. On the other side of the lake is the wild, threatening land of the Gentiles. The chaos zone. The sea, the mythical home of the devil in the deep blue sea, separates these two turfs.

En route from one side to the other, the devil brews a storm that scares seasoned sailors spitless. Sheer fear seizes them. They wake Jesus. Jesus rebukes the storm. Rebuke is an interesting word to use for storm-stilling. It's the word Luke usually uses for demon-busting. Jesus speaks. Storm stops.

Reminds me of my eighth grade shop teacher, Mr. Craft. Don't you think that's a good name for a shop teacher? Mr. Craft. He'd walk in on 30 eighth graders horsing around with hammers, boards, and power tools. He'd say one word. "Boys!" And you could hear a pin drop.

I wonder what Jesus said to the storm? "Boys!" Or maybe just, "Sssh!" The disciples were now as awed by Jesus as they were by the storm. "Who is this?" They were beginning to catch on that the most high God had put on skin and crawled into their boat. But before they had time to figure it out, they arrived on the other side.

Gentile territory. Gang turf. Devil's ground. And a man in whom the devil had brewed a mess immediately greets them. Townspeople had incarcerated him in chains. He broke loose. He used to live in a house with his family. Now he lived in a graveyard, the abode of the unclean bodies and spooks. He was wild, naked, uncontrollable, nasty, loud, alone, threatening. He was chock full of demons. Demons had separated him from his family, his home, his town, his friends, his clothes, his sanity, his senses. And now demons had taken over his voice and were talking to Jesus.

The *Exorcist* was rereleased this week. A poll on *Good Morning America* says that it is still the scariest movie of all times. Something inside tells us that nothing is as frightening as what the devil can do given free reign inside a human body. The demons see Jesus and want to know their fate. They suddenly become like eighth grade boys in Mr. Craft's shop class. Jesus asks their name. They are legion, which means 5,600. We've met most of them. They have names. Rage. Anger. Envy. Violence. Prejudice. Abuse. Rape. Drugs. Alcohol. Wildness. Pornography. Murder. Theft. Madness. They have names. And they do great harm.

This man is their poster child. He is their apartment complex. He is their post office box.

I don't know about you, but if I'm one of the disciples, I'm backtracking toward the boat.

I love Luke's comic relief. The demons know they are about to be evicted and they beg to go live in a herd of pigs nearby. They prefer the low-rent district of squealing, mud-wallowing pigs to "the abyss." Jesus lets them move into the pigs. Once there they make a beeline to the sea, the residence of the devil in the deep blue sea. They are going home to papa. But little do they know, Jesus just put papa in his place on the way over.

Then we meet the townspeople. They never really cared about the guy. They just wanted him out of their hair. In chains or out in the cemetery, it didn't matter, as long as they didn't have to deal with him. It seems that government, at best, can only restrain and relocate evil. There are limits to our human efforts to corral evil. When the townspeople hear about the man and the pigs, they go out to see what's going on. The change is awesome. The wild man sits at Jesus' feet. The naked man is wearing clothes. The demented man is in his right mind. The destructive man is at peace. The chained man is calm. And the townspeople say the same thing to Jesus that the demons said, "Please go away. Please leave us alone. We are managing fine as we are." They are more afraid of Jesus than they were of the wild man.

Had I been these townspeople, I hope I'd have said:

- Jesus, would You come to our jail. There are some people I want You to meet.
- Jesus, would You mind spending a day at the Department of Child and Family Services? There are some angry men I'd like You to meet.
- Jesus, would You meet with a senior high student who keeps threatening to beat me up if I fail him?
- Jesus, would You come with me on a drug bust?

Do you know what I think? I think Jesus would have said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes." He goes with us into the storm of evil that threatens to sink our community. He goes with us to deal with hostile, angry, hateful demons that have taken up residence inside our fellow humans. He goes with us to jails, courtrooms, crime scenes, emergency rooms, dark alleys, angry homes, drug busts, and drunken brawls. He goes with us to the end of the earth. It's where He's always been going. And if we dare read ahead in Luke 9:1-2, we discover that it's where Jesus is sending us.

Response of the People

Can Jesus really go with us to these places? Hear the testimony of Lt. Matt Adamson, area director of our drug enforcement team. Enter Matt.

(Matt gave a powerful testimony of God's call to service and guidance in his career. We invited all the public servants to stand. We thanked them for their work and asked the people seated around them to surround them for a moment of prayer. We prayed for them. In one service the choir sang "Heal Our Land." In our other service a soloist sang "We Can Make a Difference.")

Blessing

May the power of God send you from this sanctuary to the darkest corners of our county. May you find courage to face the evil that threatens you and your neighbor.

May you see demons flee from the people being set free in Christ. May the Spirit of loving power rest on you in fullness.

Week Three
HOLY HABITS RARELY SEEN:
TENDING THE RIGHT GAP

For this service, you will see the worksheet developed eight weeks in advance. The sermon text and guiding idea is sketched but undeveloped. The text is the story of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. They pray radically different prayers and receive surprising responses from God. The central idea is how we measure ourselves spiritually. Our worship team created this worksheet to guide the plot of the service.

Entrance

The standard to which we should aspire is Christlikeness. Opening songs, scriptures, prayer, and welcome will focus on the desire to be made like God.

Bad News

Our drama team will develop a humorous look at pharisaical measuring sticks in a modern-day church. A pastor will line his people up for inspection and compare them with each other. (Linda Stone wrote a hilarious drama titled *The Review* in which Pastor Howitzer inspected the troops.)* We have discovered that humor works best when it comes to revealing things about ourselves we don't easily admit.

Good News

Two men stand to pray in the temple. They live radically different lifestyles. The Pharisee was every bit as good as he said he was in his prayer. And the tax collector was every bit as evil as the Pharisee said he was. But the tax collector goes home justified. Why? Because the Pharisee tended to the gap between himself and the tax collector, and offered the difference to God. The tax collector recognized the gap between himself and God, and asked for mercy.

Response of the People

We will offer the people a time of prayer. We will ask them to stand "in the temple" to offer their prayer to God. They may either tell God how much better they are than other people they know, or they may tend to the gap between them and God. If they choose the latter, we suggest that they pray the prayer of the tax collector, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Closing music will celebrate the mercy of God to forgive.

Blessing

Send the people into the world tending the right gap and measuring themselves by looking into the face of Jesus, the perfect mirror of humanity.

*The two dramas referenced in this chapter, and other original productions, are available from Linda Stone. You can contact her at <www.lstone@collegechurch.org>.

Section Two: Theological Reminders

Chapter Eight

The Creation of a Worshiping People

“Good morning, Mr. Moses. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to go down into Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let My people go. I have heard their cries and am sending you to bring them out of slavery. Your goal on this mission is to bring them back to this same spot, and to worship Me on this very mountain. I will be with you. This tape will self-destruct in 30 seconds.”

And so begins the story of the creation of a worshiping people. God our Creator is best understood from the future. God is calling into existence that which does not yet exist. Like a parent beckoning an infant to take her first step, God is in our future calling us into existence as His holy people. The greatest work of creation is the resurrection of Jesus. It is the model for everything that is being brought to completion by the Creator God. The story of Exodus is our story. It is the Old Testament equivalent of the Resurrection.

The story begins with
a barefoot man standing before a burning bush,
a people crying out in oppression,
a God who hears cries, sets free, and calls for
worship as the grateful response of liberation.

Moses offered token excuses to the mission, but God countered every one. And before we know it, Moses and his smooth-talking PR pal, Aaron, are standing in front of Pharaoh making their speeches.

“But Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.’ Then they said, ‘The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword.’ But the king of Egypt said to them, ‘Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!’” (Ex 5: 2-4, NRSV).

It appears that this may well be Mission Impossible. Pharaoh decides that, if they have time to think about unionizing, they apparently aren’t working hard enough. So he increases the daily brick quota on the Goshen factory. He makes their life harder than ever.

The pressures of work are a challenge to the worshiping people of God. We are easily consumed by the demand to produce. Pharaoh is still raising the brick quota and calling for more. It’s hard to fit worship into a world driven by Pharaoh.

Where we would tend to cave in to Pharaoh’s demands and make more bricks, God steps up to the challenge with a round of plagues. The dialogue between God and Pharaoh begins to sound like a broken record.

God: Let My people go, so they may worship Me.

Pharaoh: No.

God: Plague 1—Water turned to blood

God: Let My people go, so they may worship Me.
Pharaoh: No.
God: Plague 2—Heaps of frogs

God: Let My people go, so they may worship Me.
Pharaoh: No.
God: Plague 3—Gnats galore

God: Let My people go, so they may worship Me.
Pharaoh: No.
God: Plague 4—Swarms of flies

I think you get the point. Each time the command to let the people go is based on worship. Dialogue 5, 6, and 7 bring on sick livestock, boils, and hail. Under threat of locusts, some of Pharaoh's officials suggest that he rethink his position.

"Pharaoh's officials said to him, 'How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?' So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, 'Go, worship the Lord your God! But which ones are to go?' Moses said, 'We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, because we have the Lord's festival to celebrate.' He said to them, 'The Lord indeed will be with you, if ever I let your little ones go with you! Plainly, you have some evil purpose in mind! No, never! Your men may go and worship the Lord, for that is what you are asking.' And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence" (Ex 10:7-11, NRSV).

Pharaoh is no dummy. Three days away from the family would make the men of Israel as homesick as a group of Promise Keepers. But Moses refuses the offer. Either we all go worship, or none of us goes. Apparently it matters to God that the generation gap be bridged in worship. It is for young and old, Grandpa and little Freddie. Families do this together.

Pharaoh stiffens again. Plague 8 follows—Loads of locusts. Plague 9—Darkness where Pharaoh lived. Broad daylight in the Israelite camp. Pharaoh decides it's time to talk again.

"Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, 'Go, worship the Lord. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you.' But Moses said, 'You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the Lord our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the Lord our God until we arrive there.' But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, 'Get away from me! Take care that you do not see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.' Moses said, 'Just as you say! I will never see your face again'" (Ex 10:24-29, NRSV).

The conversation has turned deadly. Pharaoh suggests they go worship without their livestock—their money. Moses refuses. When the people of God appear for worship, everything is made available to God. When we worship, we bring everything we have before God. He has total rights to our cows and our cash. We leave nothing behind. Pharaoh just doesn't get it. But he is about to.

Plague 10 brings death. In every home in Egypt, someone is dead. God has brought the strongest nation in the world to its knees for one reason—so that His people may worship Him. God is serious about our worship.

Exodus 12 is the account of the Passover meal. God's people are given instructions on how to avoid a visit from the Death Angel. A supper is instituted. The supper calls for sacrificial blood, traveling clothes, costly deliverance. The shadow of this historic meal falls across every Communion table. God's people are going on a journey toward freedom, and worship is the ultimate destiny. They leave behind a nation in shambles and begin their journey to the holy mountain. Along the way, they reveal that they have much to learn. God provides and teaches. And finally, they arrive at burning bush mountain, Mount Sinai. Moses has accomplished the mission. He is home . . . sorta.

In Exodus 20, God calls Moses up on the mountain and gives instructions for the people. It should be no surprise that heading the list is the command to worship the Lord and no one else. The law-giving goes on for four whole chapters. God doesn't miss anything. His law defines community life, justice, care for the needy, retaliation for violence, sexual relationships, crop rotation, Sabbath rest, and annual worship festivals. His liberated people are to live like their Liberator. "I, the Lord your God am holy; be holy in all you do." We are set free for freedom. At the core of our worship is the reminder that we are called to be holy.

Moses faithfully delivers God's law to the people. They agree to live by it. All is well. They enter into a blood covenant. Each now has the right to expect certain behavior of the other in light of promises made. They are oath-bound, blood-sealed, law-loving covenant partners.

Following the covenant ratification ceremony, Moses goes back up on the mountain. He is there for 40 days and nights. What did God and Moses talk about all that time? Read chapters 25—31 and you'll see. For seven long chapters, God tells Moses how worship is to be done. In Genesis, it takes all of 31 verses to tell the story of the creation of the world. Here, it takes 243 verses for God to tell Moses how the people are to worship.

They talk about a tent of meeting, also known as a tabernacle. It is to be placed in the center of the camp as a way of reminding the people that worship lies at the center of life. It isn't something on the periphery of a busy community. It's the hub of all we do. God talks about dimensions, colors, layout, altar, tables, basins, lampstands, the ark of the covenant, the seat of mercy, the bread of presence, the oil of anointing, the garb of the priest. Do you get the feeling that our worship matters to God? The places we gather are holy because God is among us. We are moved in these places by what we see and hear and smell and touch and taste. Those who lead us in worship should be prepared. Exodus 25—31 is rarely studied in depth. The details overwhelm us. But buried in the details are rich truths about our worship.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the Israelites are getting restless. Moses' fickle associate pastor, Aaron, has gotten itchy explaining Moses' 40-day disappearing act. The people decide to pass the plates, collect gold, and fashion a golden calf in honor of "the God who brought us up out of Egypt." They had a big party for the calf. How did they know to do this? Apparently, people instinctively worship. They just aren't sure what/who to worship. Without God and godly leaders, people will find something to devote their lives to. Watch sports enthusiasts. Watch Wall Street investors. Watch

dotting grandparents. We will find something to worship, something to give our gold to, something to dance around. God's response is swift.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves the image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation'" (Ex 32: 7-10, NRSV).

I feel sorry for Moses. When he stood at the burning bush, he heard God say, "I have heard the cries of my people." Now God says to Moses, "Your people have acted perversely." God no longer identifies with this calf-worshipping, covenant-breaking people. He is ready to wipe them out and start all over again with Moses and create for himself a people who will worship Him. And don't think God can't do it. He started with an old childless couple named Abraham and Sarah when He created Israel. God can do it again.

After all God has done to liberate these people, He is ready to destroy them for one reason—they worship other gods. Moses intervenes with an appeal to God's honor and name. "What will the Egyptians think? That you lured these people out here in the wilderness to destroy them? What kind of a God will they believe you are?" God relented. Apparently it matters to God how others interpret His relationship with His people. God lets them live. But that's not the end of the story.

In Exodus 32, the sons of Levi are inducted into the priesthood by the bloody act of slaying calf-worshippers. Moses says to them at the end of the killing, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of a son or a brother, and so have brought a blessing on yourselves this day" (Ex 32: 29, NRSV). The leaders of worship must care more about what God wants than what the people want. Sometimes the role of a priest is bloody.

In light of this worship disaster, the journey seems to be in jeopardy. Will God go with these people to the Promised Land? Moses and God discuss the matter.

"He (God) said, 'My presence will go with you (singular), and I will give you (singular) rest.' And he (Moses) said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us (plural) up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth'" (Ex 33: 14-16, NRSV).

The primary issue for Moses is the presence of God. The only thing that distinguishes us as the people of God is His presence in our worship. An absent God calls into question our reason for gathering. God again relents and commits to keep covenant with these people. But He issues a stern warning about worshipping the pagan gods they will encounter along the way.

Before they set out, God calls Moses back up on the mountain one last time. This time, when he returns to camp, his face is shining. He begins to teach the people. We find his sermon in Exodus 35—40. It's a long speech. And guess what it's about? You guessed it. Worship. He tells them how to build the tent of meeting. He gives them its dimensions, colors, and layout. He names the subcontractors. He tells them to put it in

the center of the camp. He calls for altars, basins, lampstands, an ark of the covenant, a seat of mercy, bread of presence, and oil of anointing. He instructs them in priestly dress, sacrifice, and offerings. At the end of his speech the story comes to an end with these words:

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey” (Ex 40:34-38, NRSV).

Worship characterizes the journey of the people of God . . . from the moment of our liberation from slavery . . . to our arrival in the promised land . . . and every day along the way. God has created a worshipping people. All praise be to God.

Chapter Nine

INVITATION TO THE DANCE

One of the great worship hymns of our times finds us singing, "God in three persons, blessed Trinity." If God is to be understood like we understand "persons," what does this say about our worship of God?

Our culture identifies a person as a separate individual
with an identifiable body
a recognizable face
distinguishing characteristics

In other words, we identify ourselves as separate skin-sacks of blood and bones.

If God is three persons, can we do with God what we can do with three persons? Can we separate God? Put Father in one room, Jesus in another, and the Spirit somewhere else? Can we get them to disagree? Can one vote Democrat, one Republican, and one Independent? Can they divorce? Can we find characteristics true of one but not the other two?

Sure, these are silly questions. But maybe not as silly as some of our folk theology about God. Have you heard the one about the Father sitting miffed in heaven, ticked off with what we've done to His creation, and poor Jesus running around on earth trying to placate the Father so He'd love us again? Or the one about getting Jesus when I was saved but getting the Holy Spirit when I was sanctified? (Maybe this suggests a third work of grace in which we receive the Father?)

If we think of God as we think of persons, we can think silly things. But maybe our definition of person is all wrong. In the Bible a person is identified not by his or her separateness from others but by connection to others. An Israelite is a son or daughter of Abraham. Saul is named as one who belongs to the tribe of Benjamin. Covenants unite people and give them their identity. Personhood is not our radical difference from each other but our radical belonging to each other.

And where did we learn this? By looking into the face of God. God cannot be divided into three pieces that make sense alone. When we say "God," we mean Father, Son, and Spirit. It is impossible to explain what any one of the three does without reference to the other two. God is inseparable. We would not know God as Father apart from Jesus revealing this to us. God is rarely spoken of as Father in the Old Testament. It is Jesus who teaches us to pray "Our Father." The Spirit is the breath of God who creates and resurrects. Into the dark, formless chaos God breathes. Into the dead body of Jesus, God breathes. We call this the Holy Spirit. Jesus as Risen Lord is incomprehensible apart from the Holy Breath of God, the Spirit. The Father who creates sends the Son who redeems through the Spirit who sanctifies us into the union that exists as Father, Son, and Spirit.

Have you ever seen three children in a circle, holding hands, going round and round in an ecstasy of laughter, love, rhythm, and unity? This is a picture of the Trinity. The fact that there are three means that a decision has been made to be inclusive. Movement depends on paying attention to the others. Each follows in step. No one

leads. The joy on each face is a reflection of the joy on the other two. Life and energy exist *in the center of the circle*.

This idea of God as a circle dance is not original. It is very old. *Perichoresis* is the technical term for circle dance. And I think we can learn some things about worship from this image of God.

Worship is possible because it is already going on in the center of this circle. The idea that worship occurs when we come together to execute (pun intended) a worship service is misinformed. Worship does not begin with our Entrance move. Worship has been going on forever among Father, Son, and Spirit. Entrance simply reminds us that we are graciously invited into the fellowship known as Trinity. God has extended the invitation in the name of Jesus. We step into a stream of worship that started before the world was formed. We are latecomers. And lest we think that a contemporary worship movement has discovered something new, we need to remember that creativity in worship is the gift that flows from the center of this circle dance.

One Wednesday night, we divided our congregation into three groups and sang in a round. We were singing,

*Father, I adore you.
Lay my life before you.
How I love you.*

*Jesus, I adore you.
Lay my life before you.
How I love you.*

*Spirit, I adore you.
Lay my life before you.
How I love you.*

Our sanctuary extends in three directions, all facing the center pulpit. As people sang, they were actually looking at each other. It was a beautiful moment as different words rose and fell in the mixture of sounds. We were singing three different lines at one time, but one song. It was "godly." This was not something we created. We were being drawn into the circle dance of God, where Father, Son, and Spirit move in perfect rhythm singing to each other the song of self-emptying adoration. Imagine it.

The Father sings to Jesus,

*Jesus, I adore you.
Lay my life before you.
How I love you.*

And Jesus sings at the same time back to the Father,

*Father, I adore you.
Lay my life before you.
How I love you.*

Jesus is offering himself to God as a sacrifice for our sins. He is offering His perfect obedience on our behalf. And both Father and Son sing love to the Spirit who proceeds from them to create and resurrect the world and its creatures.

*Spirit, I adore you.
Lay my life before you.
How I love you.*

God singing an eternal round of love, adoration, life, self-emptying grace. And we are invited into this circle.

Worship is not something we do for God. It is the gift of God to people who have no invitation to the dance of life. We were sitting at home, dead, without a lover, and the-Father-in-Christ-through-the-Spirit invited us into a circle of holy love. We experience rhythm and love and unity that we didn't create. The fact that we can worship is sheer grace. Worship is the ongoing reality of the Trinity in which we are called to participate.

OUR WEEK AND OUR WORSHIP

This view of God as a circle dance also suggests that our worship is not dependent on the kind of week we've had.

Have you ever found yourself thinking that God can't wait to see you on Sunday to congratulate you for your sainthood over the previous six days. You had personal devotions every day. You led someone to Jesus. You paid your tithe and gave beyond. You said the right words and did the right deeds. You came to church believing you had done something that would put a smile on God's face. Today you can really worship! You have something to offer!

On the flip side, you had a horrid week. No devotions. You didn't crack your Bible one time. The tithe money is at the dentist's office. The last straw broke on Thursday afternoon and you told your boss what you really think. You were an absolute grouch at home. The neighbors probably heard you explaining reality to your 15-year-old son. You wake up on Sunday morning and the last place you want to be is church. You have nothing to offer God. You have disappointed Him all week long. He doesn't want to see you. You're not going.

Do you ever find yourself thinking like this?

Good week = I can worship.

Bad week = I can't show up.

There is a phrase for this kind of thinking. It's called "having confidence in the flesh." It's believing that our worship is acceptable or unacceptable based on what we've done or not done. This is wrong.

Our worship is acceptable through the mediation of Jesus, our High Priest. We place too much emphasis on ourselves when we think of worship as dependent on our doings. This is about the God who dances in a circle of grace. We can come just as we are, good week or bad. What makes us acceptable is not what we have to offer but what Jesus offers on our behalf.

Does this suggest it doesn't matter how we live? That we can worship on Sunday and go live like the devil all week long? That we leave worship and collect sin like a garbage truck, only to dump it on God again next Sunday? No, it doesn't mean that at all. It means that our lives become acts of worship, offered to the Father, in the name of Jesus, empowered through the Spirit.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12: 1-2, NRSV).

Our lives are the outflow of being graced in the circle dance. We are a reflection of what we have experienced from God.

HOW WE THINK ABOUT CONGREGATION

What does it mean to be a person who is part of a worshiping congregation? The cultural definition of “person” would be:

- I am an individual.
- I am distinguishable from you.
- I have a social security number that is different from yours.
- I exist in this identifiable skin sack.
- I make choices in line with my ruling desires.
- I enter relationships that are meaningful to me.
- I seek out experiences that are relevant to me.
- I have limited time and do not want to waste it on people that I find uninteresting.
- I am not obligated to you unless I choose to be, and you have no right to expect anything from me unless I give you that right.
- I am responsible for myself.

This is the dominant theology of our culture regarding humans. There is a good label for this person. Call him or her “consumer.” This individual is reaching out into the world taking things into himself or herself—experiences, people, things. He or she consumes them all.

The biblical definition of “person” would be:

- I am a child of God.
- I belong to the people of God by baptism.
- I exist as a body in a body.
- I take interest in the lives of my brothers and sisters.
- I seek to be faithful to them.
- I am in relationships that are given. Some are energizing, some are draining.
- I am obligated. People have the right to expect certain things of me in light of the covenant that exists between us.
- I cannot think of myself apart from the body of Christ.
- I am a new creation.

This is the dominant theology of Scripture regarding humans. There is a good label for this person. Call her “member.” This individual belongs to all who are in Christ and views the world through this lens.

When you think “member,” think biologically. Family member. Members of the human body—arm, leg, neck. Connected to the body. We find that word in the Bible.

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom 12: 5, NRSV).

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph 2: 19-22, NRSV).

“So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another” (Eph 4: 25, NRSV).

Being a member of the body of Christ shapes our involvement with each other. We gather for worship at the invitation of God because this is what defines us. This is who we are. This is the place we recall our given identity. This is our family. These are our brothers and sisters. We are faithful to the gatherings, not to earn points with God, but because this is essential to our very being.

This is why we attend:

- when the preaching is boring
- when we don't know the babies being dedicated
- when it is rumored that the visiting missionary has slides
- when the guy who is leading music moves around too much
- when the songs are all out of the hymnal and slow

We attend because we are “members,” not “consumers.” Consumers check out the product and determine whether or not they wish to consume it. Members just show up because they belong.

This places new weight on the meaning and practice of baptism into the body of Jesus. We are giving people a new identity. We now have the right to expect things of them. We are bound to them and they to us in ways we cannot ignore without damage to the body.

This places new weight on the meaning and practice of Communion. We are at the table together. Communion is not an intimate dinner for two—just Jesus and me—just Jesus and you. It is the meal that was cooked up in the middle of a circle dance. The aroma is compelling. We don't get our food and go eat under a tree. We sit down at the table with everyone else and share in the fellowship created by Father, Son, and Spirit. We look each other in the face and remember that we belong to each other in Christ. The Spirit is at work in the meal sanctifying us together as one.

This places new weight on infant baptism and dedication. This is not an “ooh and aah” moment for parents to show off their offspring. This is a covenant ceremony in which we lay claim to a human being and make promises to that family. I tell parents that if they aren't planning to raise this child in the church, they ought not do this. I tell them they are saying that they intend for this child to belong to us.

This places new weight on church membership. We ought to make it more meaningful than a name in a book. It is a person's decision to be identified with a visible people of God. They are joining the family as responsible servants and workers. They have the right to expect things of us and we of them. We're asking far more than agreement with doctrine and ethics. We're asking them to understand that we actually belong to each other.

This places new weight on our worship gatherings. We are not consumers looking for a praise and worship pick-me-up. We are the body of Christ, gathered in His name, participating as one in a circle dance of loving grace.

Lesson 12: The Place of the Sermon in Worship

Due This Lesson

Reading of *The Worship Plot*
Rough draft of sermon
Journaling

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will

- present a worship structure that flows out of the text
- suggest a way of going about planning a worship service

Homework Assignments

Complete and prepare to present your sermon.

Journal Prompt

How will you go about planning a worship service?

Sermon Evaluation

Preacher _____

Sermon Text _____

Title _____

1. What sermon form was used?
2. What unifying theme held the sermon together?
3. At what point did you connect?
4. When did you sense that the preacher "cared"?
5. How was your interest sustained?
6. Of the following communication issues, check any that are areas for attention:
 - _____ Lack of eye contact
 - _____ Fidgety, distracting movement
 - _____ No voice inflection, monotonous tone
 - _____ Nervousness
 - _____ Speaks too fast
 - _____ Speaks too slow
 - _____ Shifting weight back and forth
 - _____ Fiddling with keys, money, etc.
 - _____ Too loud
 - _____ Too soft
7. How were you helped?

Evaluator: _____

Lesson 13: Preaching

Due This Lesson

Sermon
Journaling

Learner Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will

- successfully present a sermon

Homework Assignments

Commit to continual improvement in the preaching of the Word.

Read Resource 13-1. The story is a great reminder of our call to offer grace each time we step into a pulpit.

Journal Prompt

What frightens you about preaching in front of your peers?

Making Space for Grace

By Don M. Wardlaw⁶

Possibly the most formidable challenge in preaching is in discovering how to make space for grace in our sermons. Perhaps we can get some clues about how better to open our sermons to grace by first hearing a story about life with Aunt Grace.

Aunt Grace, a widow for 20 years, finally admitted at 84 that she was too old to manage the farm. So she willed her lovely, old, Victorian farmhouse and the 200 acres to her only living heir, her nephew Sam. Her will provided Sam and his family the house only if he took occupancy immediately. She would build her own efficiency apartment next to the garage so Sam, his wife, Laura, and son, Jimmy, would have the run of the house as their own.

The deal seemed a winner for both parties. Aunt Grace could live out her days on the farm with the privacy she desired, while enjoying the comfort and support of family on the land. Sam and his family could take possession of a lovely home and farm at no cost to themselves. The agreement also carried the intuitive assumption that while Grace would honor the privacy of Sam's family, she, nevertheless, was welcome as family in this house that she had lovingly maintained for over 50 years.

The new arrangement proved a special boon to 10-year-old Jimmy. When Sam and Laura lived in town, son Jimmy heretofore had gone home from school to an empty house, since his mom, Laura, worked till 5:00. Now that they lived in Aunt Grace's house in the country, each afternoon Jimmy skipped from the school bus straight to Aunt Grace's apartment where she always smothered him with a big hug and put warm, freshly baked bread before him. He loved her lilting laugh that made her portly tummy jiggle. He loved the stories she told. He especially loved how she listened to his stories as if he were the most special person in the world.

Aunt Grace seemed to Jimmy to light up the old house when she dropped in. She'd sit down at the piano in the living room and play the old-time songs one after another and then sing along, sounds that somehow made Jimmy feel more solid inside. She'd eat Sunday dinner and linger over apple pie talking with Laura about canning and recipes. She pops in the kitchen with some more canned vegetables or sits with coffee at the breakfast table and talks for a while.

Jimmy sensed a difference between his parents and Aunt Grace. Sam and Laura's breakfast table was different from Grace's table. Laura usually listened to Jimmy as if waiting for him to stop talking so she could remind him to straighten his room, or wash his hands, or act more mature in church next Sunday. Laura seemed to Jimmy a nervous bundle of "shoulds" and "oughts." Sam listened to Jimmy with glassy eyes, waiting for a break in the conversation to insert one of his usual motivational pep talks about trying harder, whether playing ball or doing homework. These speeches usually began with, "Jimmy, when I was your age . . ." Jimmy was attracted to Aunt Grace because she came to him with a different spirit. Oh she had her standards aplenty, but

⁶ By Don M. Wardlaw, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL 60637.
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she didn't breathe all over him with them. She delighted in him, giving him space to make of it what he would. He'd straighten his room and make his bed for Grace in a minute if he knew that's what she wanted.

As time went on there seemed less space for Grace in the house. Laura ostensibly always had so many "shoulds" and "oughts" to do, cleaning, bills, errands, that she made it subtly clear that she didn't have much space in her life for Grace to hang around. Sam, the minute he got home, was out to the barn to tend to the feed, or check out that broken part on the tractor, thus signaling to Grace when she peeked into the kitchen that she shouldn't get in the way of his program of progress. The Aunt Grace whose ringing laughter used to fill the den, whose stories of early farm days used to bless Sunday dinner, who used to sit in Jimmy's room and hear his secrets, that Grace was now more an absence than a presence. She had gotten the message that she wasn't wanted. Now and then she'd pop into the kitchen for a minute just to maintain contact with a cheery hello. But for the most part Aunt Grace stayed out back in her apartment minding her business, living in deep sadness that she didn't seem welcome in her own house, the one she freely gave away.

A year to two later, as Grace grew more distant and feeble, Jimmy was old enough to begin to understand some things. His parents weren't so much busy as they were nervous when Aunt Grace came into the kitchen. It seemed to Jimmy that Sam and Laura didn't know what to do with Aunt Grace. They felt awkward in her presence. They didn't have her spontaneity and delight. They couldn't get with people in the natural ways Grace does. Though Jimmy couldn't put it neatly in words, he knew in his soul that his folks had crowded Aunt Grace out of her own house. They had filled the place with a censorious and laborious spirit. Grace's music, the food, delight, and stories were no longer there. Only an occasional knock on the kitchen door in the back of the house, a brief welcome and nod, and that was it. The wallpaper was never more faded and the fireplace never more cold.

Thus the challenge in our preaching, to make space for grace in the house of our sermons. Grace lived in that house long before we were born. We have been called simply to testify to the Christ-spirit that pervades and defines the walls of this sermon. We are called in this sermon house to retell the old stories of grace, to recapture the lilt of grace's laughter, to offer her courage that can keep hope alive. We are called in the house of this sermon to honor every Jimmy or Jane's story out there in the pew as if each person were the most important person in the world. We are asked as preachers to take our people on a tour of grace's house so they can absorb into their souls the sense of reconciling acceptance there, and catch a vision of the difference grace can make in us as individuals and institutions.

Nor is this preaching merely whistling in the dark. In grace's name we stand in pulpits and look racism, poverty, sexism, and war gods in the eye, and call out their demons one by one. In grace's power we help our people find the courage to name the devils involved in our self-seeking, aggression, anxiety, fear and self-loathing. Grace is a gutsy lady. She enables us to name the demons, but even more importantly she envisions for us and celebrates every personal victory over fear or greed, and every breakthrough of a Berlin Wall. Preaching grace means taking people to her house to show them how she lives there and the changes her spirit makes there. In her house we hear the sound of her singing and come to her table for the warm bread she has for us there.

But, to repeat my opening words, possibly the most formidable challenge in preaching is finding space for grace in our sermons.

How often are you and I in our preaching tempted to feature more of the spirit of Sam and Laura's table than that of Grace's table? I examine dozens of parish ministers' sermons every year. The majority of these preachers, however inadvertently, demand good behavior more than declare saving grace. A random check of radio and television sermons, homilies, or books of "best sermons of the year" regularly reveals preaching that weighs us down with demands more than buoys us up with grace. Preaching that defies grace could be called hortatory preaching. The word "hortatory" means to incite, to stir up, to prod, a kind of preaching that majors in imperatives. The hortatory preacher is the Laura in us who takes to the pulpit as a venous bundle of "shoulds" and "oughts," pushing all the people out there to love the crab next door, or demanding more honesty with income taxes and more truthfulness in marriage, or insisting that the hearers come down on God's side regarding issues over abortion or human rights. The hortatory preacher is the Sam in us who has a hundred different ways to insist that the people try harder, whether in their prayer life, or their stewardship, or their struggles with addictions.

Some might be wondering at this moment, however, "What's wrong with putting some heat on the folks from the pulpit, even in the name of grace?" Don't we all need a kick in the pants or a rap on the knuckles pretty regularly if we are to stay on the straight and narrow? You just can't hand everyone a warm loaf of Aunt Grace's bread and expect them automatically to be transformed into loving saints and social crusaders. Besides (goes the argument) people need to be shown what to do. Look where permissiveness has gotten us in our society. We can't forget Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words when he said, "Cheap grace has been the ruin of more Christians than any command of works." And further (continues the argument), what's so objectionable about a bunch of imperatives when we see Scripture is full of them? Even Jesus said we "ought" to tithe, "ought" to wash one another's feet, "ought" to lay down our lives for one another. Jesus was full of commands: "Love thy neighbor"; "Seek first God's kingdom"; "Judge not." In short, some stern warnings and demands in grace's house never hurt anybody.

As formidable an argument as this is for Sam and Laura's way in the house of preaching, the hortatory sermon, one that majors in demands, is vulnerable on four counts. First, the hortatory sermon suggests an understanding of both hearer and preacher that is limited psychologically. To tell people what they ought to do and expect them to do it suggests a simplistic understanding of the workings of the human will. You and I don't do anything just because we are told we ought to. The hortatory sermon is also limited psychologically because in prescribing behavior for other people we presume to have a working knowledge of the blueprint of transformation the Holy Spirit has for our people. Even Jesus said that only God knows the times and the seasons of transformation.

If hortatory preaching is limited psychologically, it is, second, imprisoned culturally. From the cradle to the grave we are all immersed in a cacophony of hortatory rhetoric. If we are used to strings of imperatives from the breakfast table, the athletic field, and the Rotary Club, why not the pulpit? If in one sales convention after another we keep bringing in the Lee Iacoccas and Mike Ditkas to insist with Aunt Grace's nephew Sam that we try harder, then why not expect the same from the pulpit? No wonder people expect us to preach to them as if they were the little engine who could. The only problem is such preaching saturates our hearers' minds with a works-consciousness. It

deludes our people into feeling that well-being is a human achievement rather than a gift. It's devoid of Aunt Grace's transforming spirit.

Hortatory preaching founders, third, because it is questionable ethically. When we take advantage of someone, we've got an ethical problem. Hortatory preaching takes advantage of people by demanding of them what they are not equipped to deliver. It's like when you fell to the ground in pain and I come over to help, and I stand on your chest, demanding that you get up and dance. Hortatory sermons major in demands without dwelling on the source of power that enables one to live up to that demand. I remember hearing two women coming out of a fashionable church in Richmond, VA, having heard yet one more week the eloquent demands of their preacher. One said, "He keeps insisting on what we ought to do, but he never tells us how." When we demand that people drink the living water, but don't show them where it is or how it vitalizes, we've got an ethical problem.

Hortatory preaching runs aground, finally, because it is simplistic theologically. The theological problem with hortatory preaching turns on the relation between the imperative and the indicative. The term "indicative" refers to the given of God's grace, supremely revealed in Jesus Christ and imputed by the Holy Spirit, a grace that works within us and among us to make both our personal and corporate lives truly human. Scripture constantly holds its imperatives in a close, vital interrelation with its indicatives. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," demands St. Paul, but in the next breath he shores up the imperative with a great indicative, "for God is at work in you both to will and work God's good pleasure." Or, take the imperative with the writer to the Hebrews, "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us"; notice the enabling indicative that comes right behind it, "Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." The writer is saying that the presence of Jesus enables us to run with perseverance. Every imperative in Scripture has an indicative lurking somewhere nearby that makes it possible to carry out that imperative. When you and I drift into hortatory preaching, we are offering naked imperatives, that is, imperatives without the presence of empowering indicatives. In those moments we lose touch with the fact that what drives Jimmy to want to clean up his room and make his bed is the great indicative presence of Aunt Grace in his life.

If hortatory preaching is a half a loaf, and a stale one at that, why do you and I get trapped serving this kind of bread? Well, for one, anxiety can make hortatory preachers of us all. When we grow anxious about the lagging parish program, or our own leadership abilities, or our own sense of authority, how tempting to begin majoring in imperatives in hopes of cajoling the congregation into appearing dedicated. Or, in those moments of heart-burnout, when our own sense of commitment is at stake, how easy to nervously push out people with imperatives to live the kind of dedicated faith that we cannot admit is not presently within us.

Such hortatory sermons have a telling shape. Most begin with what I call the "ain't it awful" section, a cataloguing of what's wrong with the world, usually occupying up to 75-80% of the sermon. Then comes the answer to the problem, now offered in a flurry of imperatives in the few minutes that remain.

It sounds like the ring of Laura's voice in Aunt Grace's house. The wallpaper's faded and the ashes in the fireplace are cold.

Still, why do we do it? What's behind the anxiety that drives it? Could it be that we, in all Kingdom busyness to run Laura's errands and to fix Sam's tractor, have had less

and less space for grace in the house of our being? In allowing ourselves to get so caught up in the imperatives of the parish, how easy to lose touch with grace's warm bread, her songs and lilting laughter, her nourishing presence. How easy, ironically, to be out of touch with the lady who gave us this house in the first place, and who called us to tell others what she is about.

How, then, to make space for grace in our sermons? How do we interplay indicative and imperative in such a way in the sermon that the hearers experience grace? In keeping with my subject I cannot so much prescribe as I can describe how grace comes into the house. Preaching grace starts with a fundamental orientation before we ever sit down to prepare that sermon. It means a life-stance where we are always leaving the door ajar for grace to make herself at home in all the rooms of our being. It means focusing our vision to see how many faces she wore in our household just yesterday; maybe the smile of a clerk amid a hurried errand; maybe the glance of understanding from a counselor friend; maybe the look of forgiveness from a spouse who suffered our insensitivity yet one more time. Grace-filled preaching comes from a grace-filled house where daily she gives us varied gifts of acceptance that move us along a little further toward wholeness. In prayer, meditation, musing, contemplation, focusing, dreaming, we constantly cultivate a consciousness that leaves the door open for grace to come in and celebrate God's gift in Christ—that we are somebody!

Preaching grace means, further, coming to the house of the scriptural text, and leaving the door open there to meet grace and to talk with her. So often when we are under the pressure of old hortatory habits or of the demands of others where we are losing control, we seize the passage by the throat in order to control it, explain it, master it.

We come to our study desk in a panic to squeeze out of the passage a worthy theme sentence so we can get on with the business of writing a sermon and surviving for one more week the rigors of preaching. With the nervous hands we take down a handful of commentaries from the shelves, pleading with them to deliver us from the valley of the shadow of "no ideas." Yet, in so doing, we close off possibilities for an engagement with grace there in the passage. As Fred Craddock so wisely says, "Who is going to venture a thought or an interpretation when at the very same desk are six internationally known Bible scholars?" (*Preaching*, p. 106).

But look what can happen when we take a deep breath and begin to believe that our best moments in sermon preparation come when we trust ourselves enough to begin the sermon process by swapping stories with Grace. We ease back into a comfortable position, as if we had come home from school, to let Grace talk with us. On the ground of this passage Grace welcomes us so she can tell us her story . . . an old, old story of Jesus and His love. And then Grace asks us to tell her our story through this text. She asks you and me through the biblical text, "O Prodigal, what's it like in your far country?" or, "O wounded Traveler, how does it feel for a Samaritan to gather you in his arms and care for you?" or, "O fearful Jonah, tell me of your surprise when even the belly of the whale could not hide you from God."

When you find yourself in that text, then that text finds itself in you. Now the door is open for Grace to enter the house of the sermon. And we're not talking about a few moments in the kitchen at the back of the sermon, patronizing Grace. We're not thinking about simply allowing Grace and word or two at the end on the way out the back door. Rather, we are talking about giving Grace the space to do her thing. This means turning the corner on "ain't it awful" at least halfway through the sermon in

order to picture the possibilities of Grace at work in the households of the hearers' lives. This means spending time describing rather than prescribing new life happening in the streets and alleyways of your people's lives. This means, to put it in Karl Barth's terminology—showing people ways Grace turns demand into permission.

With this kind of preaching the imperative in the presence of the gracious indicative becomes the possibility. We major in picturing those possibilities, in engraving upon the consciousness of people in the pews portraits and images of what it looks and feels like for a people to live in the chemistry of God's transforming acceptance.

We don't just talk about such transformation, we enable people to experience it in the sermon. Through the major part of the sermon, you come home with your hearers from the far country. You've wakened on that vomit-stained mattress in that cold-water walkup in Greenwich Village, stared at that naked lightbulb and been surprised by a resolve rising within you to head home to the waiting Parent. Back home in Paducah the waiting Father strolls to the edge of the hill after dinner each evening and longs to see you coming up the trail from the highway down below. Each evening as she looks out the window at the sinking sun, the waiting Mother holds in her heart the deepest yearning to take you back into the comfort of her arms. In that hovel in Greenwich Village, you put on the only pair of jeans you have left, scrape up enough cash to buy the bus ticket home, and you are on your way. As the bus winds down through Philly and Cincinnati, and on into Kentucky, you discover someone a stop or two back has left a legal pad on the shelf above you. You take a stub of a pencil, draw a line down the middle of the page, and begin listing reasons on the left why they will reject you at the door, and reasons on the right why they might still take you in. With an equal number of reasons in each column your gut tightens at the thought of climbing that hill to the old homestead.

And now your bus carries you around that long gentle curve on the highway outside Paducah where you will get off at the Amoco station at the foot of the trail that leads up to the home place. You catch your breath and step down on the gravel as the bus roars off, leaving you lost in a cloud of dust. You feel momentarily paralyzed in your desire to return. But before you can clear your eyes, you are encircled and held tightly by Mama's arms. You don't need to open your eyes to see who it is. You know who it is. You know those tears that co-mingle on your cheek with hers.

And before you can blurt out how unworthy you have been, you realize that you left that legal pad on the bus. But never mind, we're going to have a party. You were lost, and now you're found.

Now that will preach! And so you preach!