

Preaching is Communication

- I. Whatever else preaching is—introducing Jesus to the unchurched, milk for infants in the faith, or strong food for the faithful—Christian preaching is *communication*.
 - A. The question: What kind of communication is Christian preaching? Answer: Preaching is *a communication event*.
 - B. Ponder this: What is the most important element in communicating the Gospel—message, speaker, listener, occasion, or God?
- II. Types of Sermons
 - A. **Message-Centered Communication** - A message of burning significance will, without art or skill, cut its own path to the hearer's heart.
 1. “Cappuccino or fail!”
 2. Concern with properly articulating the Gospel doctrinally or theologically.
 3. Unfortunately, the Gospel is not generally regarded as a message of burning significance.
 - B. **Preacher-Centered** - One-way communication.
 1. Recognizes two important things:
 - a. First, the primary tools that preachers bring to their preaching are our personality, experience, understanding, insight, and theological agenda. Theologically speaking, each of us has a unique voice.
 - b. Second, the preacher “works within an unusual network of trust and intimacy that makes the separation of character from performance impossible” so that “all preaching is to some extent self-disclosure by the preacher.”¹
 2. Much “contemporary, seeker-oriented” preaching is “preacher-centered.”
 - C. **Listener-Centered** - Two-way communication.
 1. Craddock correctly asserts that a sermon “is to be located as much among a particular group of listeners as with a particular speaker.”²
 2. Preaching requires that the preacher has a thorough knowledge of and has seriously listened to the listeners so that sermons speak for the listeners as

well as to them.

D. **Occasion-centered** - The experience is the communication.

1. Speaks to the heart and not to the mind.
2. Weddings and funerals are often “occasion-centered.”
3. Can degrade into “fluff with no stuff,” pointless emotionalism that leaves people hungry.

E. **God or Spirit-Centered**

1. Trusts in the power of God active in preaching; the Holy Spirit, without human contrivance, opens the listener’s ear.
2. Relieves both the preacher and the listeners of all responsibility.
3. Yet, trusting in the power of God does not relieve preachers and listeners of the burden of the disciplines that prepare us to preach and hear with the power of God.

F. **Preaching is an event** in which the preacher, the listeners, scripture, the world, the occasion and God all actively participate. The preacher’s task is to facilitate this active participation.

III. **The Point of the Lecture: As a communication event, preparing a sermon is different from writing a term paper!**

- A. Ponder This: How is oral communication different from written communication?
- B. Reading a book is different from the act of listening to a sermon.
1. At what pace is the message presented?
 2. What do you do if you miss a point?
 3. How do you deal with distractions?

IV. Communicating Orally

A. Have a point!

1. One is plenty, thank you. Know what it is and be able to say it clearly and concisely.

2. Stay on message. Allow your point to guide you. Ask yourself: Why am I telling this story? What am I trying to say? What am I trying to accomplish?
- B. Audience Analysis - Know whom you are talking to and take these listeners seriously. How can you best facilitate their participation? How can you best get your message across to *these* people?
- C. Introductions³
1. Most fixed, prepared part of the speech
 2. Purposes
 - a. Give focus to consciousness
 - b. Provide a hermeneutic orientation
 - c. Establish shared purpose between speaker and hearers (focal image)
 3. Common errors
 - a. Introductions should not give away either the structure or the point of the speech/sermon.
 - b. Avoid sermons that whittle down to a focus, use tangential referents, and fain suspense.
 - c. Be careful of personal narrative that may lead to split consciousness.
 - d. Ask *why* before introducing a sermon with humor. Humor is often disconnected and requires a second introduction.
- D. Conclusions⁴
1. Purposes
 - a. Conclusions are governed by intention. What is the speech/sermon intended to *do*?
 - b. Conclusions are designed to conclude while maintaining some continuing impact or understanding.
 - (1) Reflective consciousness

(2) Assemble meanings by gathering images and phrases from various places in the sermon

2. Guidelines

- a. Conclusions should be concrete in terms of images and actions
- b. Conclusions should be said in simple language

3. Common errors

- a. Do not introduce new ideas but work from what has come before.
- b. Avoid tipping the congregation off that the conclusion is coming.
- c. Avoid concluding with a Yes/No question
- d. Quotations in conclusions turn the preacher into a ventriloquist's dummy
- e. Returning to an introduction can have a bookend effect
- f. Repeating a sentence more than once will build emotion for the preacher but deplete it for the congregation.
- g. Concluding with personal testimony places the preacher front and center rather than the Gospel.

E. Transitions

- 1. Transitions are not made with words but with nonverbal communication
- 2. Enumeration introduces time consciousness and congregational restlessness. They ask listeners to think categorically, which is unnatural.

F. Organization

- 1. Speeches and sermons should move in a way that gives the listeners something to discover, think, feel, decide, and do during the preaching.
- 2. Speaking and preaching is more like telling a story or a joke than laying out an argument in a term paper. Don't give away the punch line at the beginning.

G. Style

1. Within the limits of taste and convention, prepare your manuscript and preach the way you speak, in terms of both sentence structure and language.
2. Concrete images work better than vague concepts.
3. Use sentences that are short and clear and not laden with clauses.
4. Persuasion - Your method of persuasion should be appropriate to both the subject matter and the audience.

1 Craddock, *Preaching*, p. 23.

2 Craddock, *Preaching*, p. 31.

3 Buttrick, *Homiletic Moves and Structures*, pp. 83-96.

4 Buttrick, *Homiletic Moves and Structures*, pp. 97-112.