ClassNotes #1

Components of Preaching

When we remember that preaching is a form of public communication, preaching needs a speaker (preacher), an audience (listeners or the congregation), and a message. In order to create a message, we need several things. First, Christian sermons have traditionally been based on a biblical text. Second, in order to create or develop a relevant message to our listeners, we need to know our congregational context. Both text and context need to be interpreted by a proper hermeneutical method. So, the preacher needs to learn a method of biblical interpretation for preaching. Preaching also has a liturgical context. In most cases, preaching is a part of worship integrated into the entire service. Furthermore, preaching requires of the preacher communicational skills, since preaching is not a work of writing but an event of oral communication. Preaching is not an intellectual lecture, giving scientific knowledge or background information about the Bible. Neither is preaching a presentation of the preacher’s own philosophical thinking nor a political campaign speech which aims to persuade the audience to support the speaker’s interest. Rather, preaching is a proclamation of the Word of God through human words by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is anticipated to guide the entire process of preaching, from the preparation time through the moment of performance to the listeners’ lives after preaching in order for them to make fruits of the words in their daily lives. Therefore, preaching includes at least 6 components as follows:

**The Preacher:** Phillips Brooks says in his book, *Lectures on Preaching,* that  “Preaching is the communication of truth by man [sic] to men[sic]. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. . . . Preaching is the bringing of truth through personality (of the preacher).”[[1]](#footnote-1) Preachers cannot hide their personalities in their own preaching. Their personal spirituality is revealed in their preaching, too. Without self-discipline for the growth and maturity of our own spirituality, we cannot expect our preaching to be spiritual. Throughout the course, we will have time to reflect our spiritual lives by writing weekly reflections based on Parker Palmer’s book, *The Hidden Wholeness*.

**The Congregation:** Our preaching should be related to the special needs and concerns of our particular congregations and relevant to their spiritual growth. Therefore, the preaching ministry demands of us pastoral sensitivity and cultural studies of our congregations. Through these approaches, we can measure our congregation’s spirituality and guide its spiritual journey. For this purpose, we will read some books about various aspects of spirituality and conduct a survey on the congregation’s spiritual types.

**Biblical Hermeneutics:** As a Presbyterian minister who is teaching here at this Methodist seminary, I have a feeling that Iliff seems not to emphasize the Bible as much as Presbyerian seminaries. For example, Iliff does not require students to take introductory courses of biblical studies as prerequisites for taking a preaching course, while most Presbyterian seminaries require them. Methodists emphasize not only Scripture but also tradition, experience, and reason for the formation of the Christian faith. Some of my former Methodist students, however, helped me better understand the Methodist quadrilateral. They explained that in the Methodist tradition, the Bible is the center among the four sources, through which other sources should be tested and validated. I will use the Bible in this course as the major resource for preaching and help you learn how to interpret the biblical text for preaching. However, you are free to use extra-biblical resources in conjunction with biblical references, if you think it is necessary for your sermon. The Seven Steps of Biblical Interpretation is a hermeneutical tool for me to teach the method of biblical interpretation for preaching. Through the practice of the seven steps, you will understand how you can create a meaning from the text relevant to your particular congregation.

**A Liturgical Context:** Preaching is done in many different liturgical contexts. In the church context, we preach every Sunday morning. In addition, some churches have Sunday evening worship, Wednesday and Friday services, and early morning daily prayer services. Each service is designed in a distinctive way in order to meet its special purpose. Each different type of service may need a different style of preaching, appropriate to each liturgical context. These days, many pastors use the lectionary when they plan their worship services and preaching. As you may know, the lectionary is the selection of the biblical texts based on the Christian liturgical seasons. The content of the sermon in lectionary preaching will depend heavily on the particular theological theme of each season. We also preach out of the regular church context, for example, in hospitals, jails, funeral homes, at weddings, on university campuses, at retreat centers, campgrounds, in revival meetings, etc. The preacher needs to consider these different worshipping contexts when she prepares sermons. When you prepare your three sermons for the course requirements, please specify your liturgical context.

**Methods of Communication**. David Buttrick says in his book, *Homiletic*, that “While preaching is not an art, it is artful. There is craft connected with the shaping of sermons.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Likewise, preaching needs skills just like musicians and artists do. Preaching is not a type of presentation of a report delivering objective knowledge that the preacher learned from the Bible. Rather, preaching is supposed to be a communication of truth, through which a transforming event happens. In order to fulfill this goal, a preacher needs effective communication skills. Sermons need to be shaped and delivered in an effective way. The importance of preaching methods is well described by Fred Craddock when he says that “It is the method that effects the experience. The method is the message. So is it with all preaching: *how* one preaches is to a large extent *what* one preaches.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Therefore, preachers need to acquire skills at least in three areas: how to design the movement of a sermon, how to use language, and how to deliver the message in the most effective way. I agree with Buttrick when he says that “Though some preachers may be unusually gifted, preachers are *not* born, they are *trained*.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Through three preaching assignments throughout the course, you will practice preaching, gain some constructive feedback from the instructor, peers, and your local sermon feedback group and review your own sermon tapes as ways to improve your communication skills.

**The Presence and Work of the Holy Spirit.** It is hard to prove objectively the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in preaching. But, it is only possible for preaching to be spiritual when the Holy Spirit is present and working in and for our preaching. Some preachers misunderstand that the presence and work of the Holy Spirit is extemporary and mystical, independent from human efforts. Consequently, they do not prepare their sermons except for praying. However, as Paul the Apostle says somewhere, the Spirit works in an order. We anticipate the presence and work of the Spirit from the beginning of our preparation to the end of the preaching event. Furthermore, we pray that the Spirit works even **after** the preaching moment to fulfill the preached message within the listeners’ lives. In order to make our preaching spiritual, we preachers, first of all, need to diligently discipline ourselves with spiritual practices and discernment. Second, we need to prepare and preach our sermons with, in, and through the Holy Spirit (i.e., as a partner of the Holy Spirit) with enthusiasm and passion for truth. Throughout this course, I hope you and I experience an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit through our spiritual disciplines with prayer, meditation, singing, reading, and preaching.

1. *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1878), p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. D. Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. F. Craddock, *As One without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Buttrick, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)