**ClassNotes #5**

**The Craft of a Sermon**

1. The Sermonic Form

People usually regard the content of the sermon as the most important element of preaching, and the form or style carrying the content of the sermon as a mere container. Yet, this is not true. Both content and form are closely related in crafting a sermon. Different forms can alter the content of a sermon and make it function differently. So, it may be true that each sermon must have its own particular form that is inseparable from the focus and function of the sermon. As Fred Craddock says in his book, *As One without Authority*, effective preaching calls for “a method consistent with one’s theology because the method is message; form and content are of a piece.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Contemporary homileticians have been concerned with developing a variety of sermonic forms as alternatives to the traditional point-making style. One of the major differences regarding the sermonic form between the contemporary approach and the traditional one is that the former is based on the idea that the sermonic form should be listener-oriented, while the latter is speaker-oriented. In other words, the traditional approach is concerned with how to speak what the preacher wants to say, the contemporary approach is concerned with how the listener listens. So, the primary concern of the contemporary approach to the sermonic form is how to effectively approach the ways in which the listeners can effectively experience the sermon. Consequently, designing the sermonic form is a creative work based on the preacher’s pastoral sensitivity and skills of communication. It requires of the preacher discipline and practice.

If we consider the design of the sermonic form a creative work, it leads us to understand that there is no single proper form for a sermon. Perhaps, some of you have listened to the same type of sermon year after year at your church and now think that **that** particular form that you are used to constitutes a “proper” sermon. There is no evidence, however, that the Jewish or Christian communities created an oral form and called it a sermon. Instead, the Bible contains many different literary forms to proclaim the Word of God, such as parables, letters, dialogue, poem, etc. Just as all of these literary forms were used in the Bible for effective communication, so the sermonic form is equally diverse. I encourage you to keep thinking creatively what kind of sermonic form can be the most effective for your particular message. During the Gathering Days, we will discuss more how to design a sermon based on the hand-out, “Styles of Preaching” (posted in Canvas).

2. Sermonic Language

Our next concern with crafting a sermon is the use of language. What kind of language is effective for preaching? Here, I mean by language such categories as imperative language versus indicative language, prescriptive language versus descriptive language, poetic language versus prosaic language, dialogical (or conversational) language versus monological language, and exclusively male-centered language versus inclusive language.

What kind of language shall we use for preaching? This is a matter of theology. For example, if we understand that Christian preaching is an invitation to the good news of Jesus Christ, the invitational mood will be created by indicative and descriptive language, rather than imperative and prescriptive language. For those who understand God as gender-specific (masculine), the use of inclusive language would be a challenge for them. Moreover, if preachers understand themselves as the mouthpiece of God, they would regard preaching as an authoritative monologue given to the congregation from above, rather than a dialogue with the listeners. Indeed, consciously or unconsciously, our theology of preaching controls our use of language for preaching.

Can you remember what language has been used in sermons that you have heard in your church? What language do you think you want to use in your preaching? You need to be intentional when you choose your homiletical language, since it is the medium carrying your theology.

1. Fred Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)