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Applicatory Introductions in Preaching

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Introduction

This writer agrees with what Stott had pointed out concerning how preachers were using a traditional way to approach preaching in their introduction. By introducing sermon in such a traditional way, he said the preachers would turn off many listeners:

The traditional way of introducing a sermon is to announce one's text. The value of this beginning is obvious. It declares from the start that we accept the Christian preacher's responsibility to expound God's Word, rather than ventilate our own opinions. Nevertheless, this opening turns many people off; they find it too traditional, too ecclesiastical, too dull.²

This paper is to propose a more creative way³ in introducing a sermon so

¹ Major parts of this paper are drawn from this writer's dissertation (pp. 18-22, Tie, 2001) and presented to MTS faculty on February 28, 2009.

² Stott, John R. W. *Between two worlds: The art of preaching in the twentieth century*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 244-245.

³ Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical preaching: The development and delivery of expository messages*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1980 & 2001), 167-168. Robinson wrote that the possibilities for an opening statement that gets attention are as wide as a preacher's creativity. Then he proceeded to list nine creative

that the congregation would get involved throughout the preaching and be able to apply what the preacher is bringing across.

Begin with Congregation

Hints of the final application of the message should be heard early in the sermon. Charles Haddon Spurgeon warned against tacking a spiritual application on the end of a message. He said, "Application begins when the sermon begins."⁴

Applicatory introductions "begin with the congregation rather than the text; this will help them understand and appreciate the message from God to follow."⁵ As a general rule, short passages should come after the introduction. When the Scripture text follows the introduction, the congregation has a mindset that helps them pay attention to the reading.⁶

Grant and Reed said it well: "The preacher begins by tying the message to some aspect of the congregation's interests and concerns. The sermon becomes identified with the broad range of life interests. Of course, the

statements that a preacher could use. He emphasized that however a preacher begins, make the most of the first twenty-five or thirty words to seize attention so that they would be a clue to what follows may be worth thirty minutes of listeners' time.

⁴ Ayer, William Ward. *The art of effective preaching*. (Bibliotheca Sacra, 124(493), 30-41, 1967), 39-40.

⁵ Adams, Jay E. *Truth applied: Application in preaching*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), 78.

⁶ Robinson, 166.

interests touched on relate directly to the message.”⁷

A preacher should not assume that his congregation sits expectantly on the edge of the pews waiting for his sermon.⁸ He should grab the attention of the congregation by surfacing needs “so that people listen not only because they ought to but because they want to.”⁹

When Stott wrote about a good introduction in preparing sermons, he said: “So at least sometimes we shall be wise to begin situationally instead of biblically, with our topic instead of our text, for then we start where people are, rather than where we hope to take them.”¹⁰

To begin with the congregation, the preacher needs to do at least four things:¹¹

1. To create an event that grabs and tightly holds the listeners’ attention.
2. To involve the congregation in the event.
3. To give a personalized introduction using the second person “you.”
4. To make a promise, explicitly or implicitly, that the sermon

⁷ Grant, Reg & Reed, John. *The power sermon*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1993), 62.

⁸ Robinson (1980), 160.

⁹ Ibid, 161.

¹⁰ Stott, 244-245.

¹¹ Adams, 83.

will be from God's Word about the congregation and their relationship to Him.

Create an Event

Grant and Reed emphasized, "Never preach on a Sunday morning without first looking at the front page of the newspaper. Sure it's the last minute, but you need to be aware of late-breaking events."¹² They went on to show an example of how the headline news on the tragic event of Delta Airline crash at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport had become part of the sermon introduction on that particular Sunday morning. They then wrote:

The field was ready to receive the Word; the Lord had plowed it. People were distracted, upset, looking for some assurance that God hadn't slipped up. It is the preacher's responsibility to be sensitive to the immediate, sometimes tragic, point of interest and use it as an entry point to get God's Word of comfort across. Be sensitive to events that are shaping the world, the country, and the community; build them into the introduction.¹³

Adams pointed out:

The first two sermons in the Book of Acts were in the fullest sense occasional. That is to say, they arose out of and were addressed

¹² Grant & Reed, 63.

¹³ Ibid, 63.

to an audience at a given occasion or event.... In each of these instances, the introduction to the sermon was an event.¹⁴

The “problem” is that not every time a preacher can find an event to preach out of it. Airplanes do not crash most of the times. Therefore the preacher needs to create an event. The “event” is not an objective event occurring in time and space. Rather, it is subjective, occurring in the mind. Such an event can be just as real to those who listen as if it were actually happening.¹⁵

The preacher needs to create an event that grabs and tightly holds the listeners’ attention.¹⁶ Litfin said “there will always be some need you can bring to the surface in the introduction...(your listeners) should ideally possess a sense of anticipation, a sitting-on-the-edge-of-the-seat attitude toward your speech.”¹⁷

Involve the Congregation

The event created should involve the congregation. If it is directly

¹⁴ Adams, 68.

¹⁵ Ibid, 70-71.

¹⁶ For example, if you are preaching on loving your enemies, say something like: “Let’s suppose a teenage daughter has taken up with a drug using man. He is ten years older than she is. Can you love this man into the Kingdom of God? How do you respond? Do you get angry? Or do you remain calm? How do you love your enemies in this kind of situation?” (Tie, 2001, p. 47)

¹⁷ Litfin, A. Duane. *Public speaking: A handbook for Christians*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1981), 240-241.

involving the congregation, this point is superfluous. However, if the event is indirect, the preacher must show his listeners how the event is important to them.¹⁸

Richard stated, “The most important part of the main introduction is helping the audience sense a need to hear the issues you will address in the sermon. Raising the need is a critical contemporization strategy.”¹⁹

Give a personalized introduction

The preacher needs to give a personalized introduction using the second person “you.” In fact, Adams emphasized the usage of the second personal pronoun “you” throughout the sermon from introduction to conclusion.²⁰

Make a Promise

The preacher needs to make a promise, explicitly or implicitly, that the sermon will be from God’s Word about the congregation and their

¹⁸ Adams, 83.

¹⁹ Richard, Ramesh. *Scripture sculpture*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1995), 107.

²⁰ Please read “Use of Second Personal Pronoun ‘You’ in Preaching” written by this writer and published in Malaysian Association of Theological Schools (MATS) Journal, 2008.

relationship to Him.²¹ He then needs to keep the promise.²²

In the introduction, the preacher should find parallels between the congregation's situation and the biblical story. Grant and Reed states:

Establish the parallels in the introduction, then continually reinforce and build on them throughout the sermon. It is like weaving a garment. By the end of the message, a strong, thick fabric of thought has been created, a practical message that can be taken out and applied against harsh realities of life. It all starts in the introduction.²³

Conclusion

In a counseling session, people have come to counselors with the readiness to listen and find solutions to their problems. However, in a church service, the congregation may not be ready to listen to the preacher. Therefore it would be wise for the preacher to begin with the congregation instead of the text by using more creative and applicatory introductions to draw people's attention to God's Word and how they can apply His Word in their lives.

²¹ For example, to continue the above example, you can say "Let us see what the Word of God has to say about that kind of situation. What does God say about loving your enemies? Shall we turn to Matthew 5:38-48." (Tie, 2001, p. 48)

²² Adams, 83.

²³ Grant & Reed, 72.

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