

A RESTUDY OF HOMILETICAL PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

The pastor of a Christian congregation has many duties. His work is varied. I'm sure that many of you have seen a position description of the ministry similar to the one which follows.

The pastor teaches. He heals, though without pills or knife. Sometimes his duties border on social work. Judging by the advice often sought of him, some must think that he is a lawyer. He visits those who are sick, marries people, buries the dead, labors to console those who sorrow and to admonish those who sin. He plans programs, appoints committies, and somehow in this maze of varied tasks he is supposed to find time to be a scholar. He spends considerable time in keeping people out of each other's hair. And in the midst of all this he prepares a sermon for his congregation once or sometimes more than once a week.

Now hidden in this complexity of differing duties was one responsibility which far outshines all the rest. Most of you would be able to tell me immediately which one it was. If you're not sure which to choose, allow me to ask you a question. Why is a pastor also and often called a preacher? Yes, there you have it. It is because our main work is that of preaching - preaching the Gospel of salvation. Once a week, or sometimes more often, the entire congregation, or at least the greater share of it, assembles in the Lord's house to receive a message from His Word. For twenty or twenty-five minutes the pastor has an opportunity to apply the message of the Scriptures to the problems, needs, cares and concerns of his people. Preaching, homiletics, is the tool he has at his disposal for this work. And it goes without saying that the faithful, conscientious pastor will develop his skill in using this tool to the very best of his ability. "Is preaching that important?" you ask. Listen to this. "There is nothing that so attaches people to the church as good preaching." (Apology to the Augsburg Confession) Therefore it must be the faithfully sought goal of every pastor to become as effective in the pulpit as he is able, with the gifts his God has given him.

Unfortunately not all pastors seem to recognize the importance of such dedication to becoming the best preacher they are capable of being. "Most of the men in the ministry today are good men, but most of them are not first rate preachers. The tragedy of it is that most of them do not seem to realize that preparing and delivering sermons is the main business of the preacher. The result is they spend more time and give more nervous energy and hard work to secondary things than they do to the major task." (Homiletics Notes - W.L.S.)

One more question passes through our minds before we leave this introduction and get down to the task at hand. Have we overstated our case? Have we placed preaching and homiletics, the art of preaching, on too high a pedestal? Not according to Dr. Martin Luther. Hear what he has to say in his sermonic exposition of Deuteronomy 6:6 - 8. "Preachers of the Word are necessary. I myself know people who think that we do not need any preachers or pastors and that we must put up with the clerics because of ancient usage and custom. They hold that the salary and expense annually devoted to them might well be used in other and better ways. They speak as though preachers were (as the man said) a 'necessarium malum' (a necessary evil). Especially the noblemen

and some wiseacres say: 'After all, we have books from which we can read the message just as well as we hear it from the clerics in the church. The devil, who has taken possession of you, moves you to say this about your reading. If our Lord God had known that the ministry is unnecessary, He would certainly have been wise and prudent enough not to have Moses preach to you. Moreover, according to your godless, devilish, foolish thinking and speaking, there would have been no need for God to ordain the Levitical priesthood later on and always to send our prophets, as He Himself says He did (Matthew 23:34). He would no doubt also at this time bid preachers and pastors stay at home. Nor would He have deemed it necessary to command parents diligently to teach the Word and not to neglect it. God knows very well what we lack."

So it would seem that a restudy of homiletical practices is indeed a subject with which we might profitably occupy ourselves for a time at this pastoral conference, as well as an endeavor in which we should be engaged constantly as we sit down in our studies to prepare sermons and step into our pulpits to deliver them. Surely, as preachers, we want to become as skilled as possible in the use of the primary tool of our profession - the art of preaching.

DEFINITION

When you instruct your confirmation classes, you teach them that the "holy Christian Church" is the world-wide gathering of believers. Faith in the heart, though unseen, is the bond which unites believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in this invisible body. But this body, this group of Christians, this thing called the Church, cannot remain invisible. Living faith brings forth fruits. And so Christians secure a meeting place where they are able to gather and use the means of grace together. Their faith expresses itself in common confession, common praise and thanksgiving for the wonderful works of God, in being comforted by hearing His Word, in hymns and prayers. What we are here describing is the Christian worship service. Without it, the Church is not fit to be called the Church.

From the very beginning the Christian congregation has been such a worshipping group. The Lord's disciples met in the temple. Such worship of the early believers was the heart and core of the entire life of the early Christian community. (Acts 2:42). An integral part of these early services was the reading of Scripture accompanied by a discussion of the portion read. Often one of the members of the group would address the rest in a friendly, brotherly conversation. In the course of time this practice became the particular prerogative of the elders and deacons of the Christian congregation and formed an important part of their official duties. Justin Martyr writes in his First Apology, "Then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things." And thus the friendly, brotherly instruction assumed more and more the form of a set oration. It was an address before equals. It was one of Christ's disciples speaking to the rest. It became, in short, a congregational sermon.

In keeping with this historical development, the congregational sermon with its informality and fraternal intimacy became known by the name *ὁμιλία*, derived from *ὁμιλεῖν*, and *ἄλη*, a crowd. You have a being or living together, an assembly, an intercourse. Both noun and verb occur in Attic Greek and in the New Testament Koine.

Later Augustine introduced the term "homilia" into the language of the Latin Church. He, however, restricted its use to the analytical form of the sermon, using the word "sermo" for the other

forms. At any rate, you can readily see from where we obtain the English words "homiletics" and "sermon." Our German heritage brings us the word "preaching" from Predigt, usually also used to refer to the sermon before the congregation.

One more comment before we leave this section of the paper called definition. We should perhaps point out the importance of sermonizing in the over-all workload of the pastor. Here I can do no better than to quote to you the words of Dr. M. Reu. "Pastoral work is of immense importance, and all preachers should be diligent in performing it. But it cannot take the place of preaching, nor fully compensate for lack of power in the pulpit. The two help each other, and neither of them is able, unless supported by the other, to achieve the largest and most blessed results. When he who preaches is the sympathizing pastor, the trusted counsellor, the kindly and honored friend of young and old, of rich and poor, then 'truths divine come mended from his lips,' and the door to men's hearts, by the magical power of sympathy, will fly open at his word. But on the other hand, when he who visits is the preacher, whose thorough knowledge of Scripture and elevated views of life, whose able and impassioned discourses have carried conviction and commanded admiration, and melted into one the hearts of the multitude, who is accustomed to stand before them as the ambassador of God, and is associated in their minds with the authority and sacredness of God's Word - when he comes to speak with the suffering, the sorrowing, the tempted, his visit has a meaning and a power of which otherwise it must be destitute."

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

The authority of the Christian preacher to preach the Word of God comes from none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. When He had called His twelve disciples He told them, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 10:7). We hear of the twelve apostles that "they went out through the towns preaching the Gospel." (Luke 9:6). Furthermore, Jesus sent out the Seventy commissioning them to preach. That this work of preaching was to be a world-wide effort we see in the Lord's words, "The Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Matthew 24:14).

To continue this work after the days of the Lord and His apostles, the church was instructed to prepare and call "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2). Such men are charged "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom," to "preach the Word," being "able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (2 Timothy 4:1-2 and Titus 2:9).

The Lord Jesus is our best example of a preacher. Many are the references concerning His preaching. For our purposes here we'll select a passage from each of the Gospels. Matthew 13:54 - "...He taught them in their synagogue"... Mark 1:14 - "...Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God." Luke 4:16-22 - Jesus' sermon in the synagogue. "...This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." John 6:59 - "These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum."

Finally, our God in His Word has also given us the purpose of such preaching. Paul tells us that the Gospel is to be preached so that sinners may be "made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:15). The purpose of preaching the Gospel to

the unconverted is to bring them to Christ. (John 4:39-42, Acts 2:37-41). The purpose of preaching to a Christian congregation is to cause God's children to be kept in grace and to grow in spiritual wisdom, in faith and in good works. (Ephesians 4:11-16).

THREE HOMILETICAL REQUISITES

There are three basic items which must be kept in the forefront of the thinking of every preacher. These three items will all be dealt with at greater length later in this paper, but we mention them together here because of their fundamental importance. A pastor should never begin homiletic work without them clearly before him as an outline which he will follow. They are: 1) A thorough study and understanding of the text. 2) A good outline. 3) A good delivery

No homiletic work can properly be begun without this roadmap. These requisites are essential, indispensable for good sermonizing. They are called to our attention here in a group, since we should keep them in our mind's eye as we proceed in this paper.

SELECTION OF TEXT

The word "text" is derived from the Latin "textus," meaning to weave, a piece of cloth formed by the interlacing or weaving together of threads or yarns. Thus the text is formed of thoughts woven together to present a truth. And the outline, then, the end result of work with the text, presents a lesson in an orderly fashion.

It goes without saying that the text must be from the Scriptures. Many things in the sermon may not find their origin in the Scriptures, but they are used only to explain and illustrate and develop the subject-matter drawn from the Bible. It alone must serve as the source of the subject-matter of the sermon.

This, then, rules out three favorite sources of many preachers and churches. They are: 1) The preacher's own consciousness. 2) The consciousness of the church. 3) Theological science. And especially in our day and age this list seems to be growing. The daily newspaper, the latest issue of a national magazine, something seen on the T.V. screen, all seem to present for some subject-matter which they deem acceptable for the Sunday sermon. Let's never forget our Christian heritage, and seek only the revelation of Christ our Savior as revealed in the pages of holy Writ when seeking a basis for the spiritual address to our congregation.

A safe and disciplined way of choosing texts is to follow one of the better known pericope series. "Pericope" is the Greek word **ΠΕΡΙΚΟΠΗ** taken over into English. It signifies a portion of Scripture "cut out." These systems are, for the most part, carefully worked out so that each text presents a complete thought and doesn't attempt to cover too wide an area. Also they offer a fine way of covering the major truths of Christian doctrine in connection with the Christian Church Year. I cannot advise strongly enough the faithful use of such a system, with the understanding that if occasionally the congregation is in need of hearing something not presented by the system, or a certain text simply proves to be unworkable for the pastor, he is at liberty to choose a text which will answer the need. He should be careful, however, that this does not become a habit.

When choosing a free text there are some things that should be kept in mind. A text should be a complete thought. Words or phrases, not

complete in themselves, should usually not be used. Words should not be taken out of context and be given a meaning they do not have. The words of Scripture should not be used in a sense other than that of the original. A text should be neither too short nor too long. Topical sermons are often written from very short texts. This can be a dangerous practice, leading to the insertion of much that is not based upon the Bible. A text should fit the purpose for which a sermon is being preached, answering the needs of the hearers. It should not be too difficult for either the preacher or the congregation.

Just remember that the text, as the basis of the sermon, will determine the entire course of the message. It's like the old adage of the chicken and the egg - which came first? Except that here we have a definite answer. The text came first. It is the basis. You don't choose a text for a sermon that is rolling around in your mind. You write a sermon based upon a text. Then your message will be God's message to His faithful.

SOUND EXEGESIS

It is a fatal mistake when a preacher selects his text, makes his outline and perhaps begins to write his sermon without a thorough study of his text and context. Beginning sermon preparation too late in the week can bring this sad situation about because of a need to hurry.

Sermon preparation should be begun with prayer. The preacher is about to enter in upon the most meaningful act of his week's work, and he should commit himself to the Lord and seek the Spirit's assistance in prayer.

It was Martin Luther who remarked, "Fleißig gebetet ist über die Hälfte studiert." More than half the work is done if we pray diligently.

Once this proper beginning is made, then read the text in a reliable translation. A person may wish to read several translations. From here go on and read the context. The immediate context, that which directly precedes and follows the text, very often gives us a better understanding of the text. One may wish to examine also the wider context, sometimes a chapter, or chapters, or perhaps even an entire book. If this is done early in the week and subsequent work is to be done on another day, here is a perfect place for a break. During the break, carry the text with you. Think on it. Mull it over in your mind. Digest it. Prior to this point, forget about commentaries. And don't look at any other man's sermon this early in your study.

When you resume, study the text in its original tongue. Now use the best commentaries, dictionaries and grammars that you can find. Finer shades of meaning will emerge from such a study. A certain grammatical construction may prove to be a great help. The idiom of the Hebrew or the Greek may indicate the greater importance of one thought over another.

Look up and study parallel Scripture passages. Do this not for proof, but to bring a better understanding of the subject-matter to be studied. This can show how the same word in the original can be used in a slightly different sense in another situation.

Now write out a list of the important thoughts in the text. In this list one main thought will present itself and evolve into your theme. Use the others to set up the message you will bring to your people in a logical and orderly fashion. But now we're getting into outlining, and that is to be the next section of this paper.

Perhaps I can sum up what I'm trying to say here best by using the word ingest. Ingest your text. Make it actually become a part of you. Grasp it, hold it, actually begin to live it. Luther had the

idea with especially the last word of his three word formula speaking of how to wrestle with a text. "Oratio - meditatio - tentatio." Prayer, meditation, and a tenacious hold on the text. This is what we need.

Finally, your study of the text may include glancing at other men's sermons on the text. It is dangerous to look at them too early, as we mentioned before. You may come across a good sermon that may so fasten itself to your mind that it prevents you from working out something independently. Laziness may lead you to plagiarize that which isn't so good. But reading a sermon on a text critically, i.e. with a mind free enough not to be enslaved by another man's work, may lead a person to see weaknesses and faults as well as excellencies in a certain way of handling the text.

OUTLINING

Let me tell you about a trick that works well for me. Invariably I'll read the text and context for next week's sermon Sunday after dinner. No more. No thorough exegesis. Just "let the thought into your head." That's about all you can call it. It doesn't take much time at all. You'll be surprised at how, by Monday morning, things have begun to jell for you. Then your deeper study will enhance the thoughts you've been having on the text, and a theme and parts will begin to float around in your mind. Another nice feature of giving yourself some added time to think on the text like this is that often these thoughts will unwittingly connect themselves with some problem in the congregation, a discussion you've recently had with a member or two, an important event which just took place, etc. This cannot but make your preaching more timely. A desirable outcome, indeed. Doing things this way may not suit everyone. Each pastor is different. I prefer to be done early and have more time to memorize. Another man may not. To each his own.

But now - more specifically to the work of outlining. A good, thorough understanding of the text assures the preacher that he cannot go far wrong in making his outline. Take the list of thoughts you've drawn up during your study. A good outline assures that these thoughts are presented in an orderly arrangement with a logical progression in thought. It should be in language which the hearer can easily and readily understand.

First the theme. The theme of the sermon should present the subject-matter of the text in brief, concise, easily understood, easily remembered form. It will become the trunk of the coat tree, its parts the pegs upon which the truths the preacher is trying to impart to his people will be hung, so that they may easily take these truths along with them when they leave the church. Therefore the theme should also divide naturally into parts. It should be announced at the beginning of the sermon. An example of theme and parts we were given at the Seminary is that of a skeleton. The theme and parts must be rigid enough to support the body of the sermon, yet not so prominent that the bones show through.

Next the parts of the theme. If your work has been done properly, the parts for your theme will present no problem. For this part of your task is not a new and independent process, but consists of merely recalling to mind the reasons and the divisions in the text which prompted you to formulate the unity of the text in your particular theme. The dividing point in the theme may be a word or phrase in the theme itself. It may be a thought not expressed in the theme. The relation that a certain thought or word in the text bears to parts of the theme may be used as the dividing point. Or it may be the entire thought of the theme.

A theme is usually divided into two or three chief or main parts; seldom more, though it can be done. Likewise the subdivisions should be few in number, two, three or four under each main division. They, in turn, should not be subdivided again. You cannot attempt to press too much detail into a sermon lasting from twenty minutes to one-half hour.

The divisions and subdivisions should be coordinate in thought and should conform in language in their relation to one another and to the theme. No subdivisions should be written into the outline unless they furnish sufficient material for a paragraph. Anything that can be handled with one or two sentences should not be given the place of a subdivision.

We should speak briefly, still, of a matter we touched upon in connection with the theme. Theme and parts, as a rule, should be announced. If in a certain sermon there is something to be gained by announcing only the first division following the theme, and the others in turn as you come to them, this would be an exceptional case. Such announcing of theme and parts helps the hearer immensely by giving him a roadmap to follow, an indication of what is coming next, which makes for much more profitable listening. It also serves as a discipline for the preacher. Having told his people where he intends to go, he can hardly be carried off on a tangent on the spur of the moment and get off the track of his prepared message. Oh, I suppose he still could. But it would have to prove to be more embarrassing to him. Here is the very best argument of all for writing out every sermon you preach. You have only those twenty minutes to one-half hour out of an entire week in which to address the greater share of your people at one time. Don't muff that golden opportunity because of a lack of preparation in the study. Outline well. Write out the sermon on the basis of the outline. Preach it that way too !

TWO SERMON METHODS

The natural and simpler method of preaching is the analytic method. This is where the preacher says exactly what the text says or expresses, although he may not always say it in the same words. He takes the main thought of his text as his theme, and allows the division of the text to determine the divisions of his sermon. Therefore this method is also called the textual method. The unity of the text is made the unity of the sermon. In this method, outline and sermon are simple. Its very simplicity is its strength and its effectiveness.

Another method is to preach what the text implies. Here, again, the main thought of the text will certainly influence the theme of the sermon. This thought, then, may be divided into its constituent parts without regard to the division of the text. The text furnishes only the main thought or theme, which then forms the source for the material of the sermon and from which its divisions are derived according to the rules of logic and rhetoric, independently of the text. This is the synthetic or topical method. The preacher may treat portions of the text first which actually occur near the end of it. The preacher may also dwell at great length on things that are not expressed in the text in so many words, but are merely implied.

This definition of topical preaching, however, is not what many understand by the word. They say that what we have described thus far all falls under the heading of textual preaching. For them the topical sermon is developed in this way. The preacher begins by choosing

a topic, which he may or may not have found in a Scripture text, and proceeds to treat and unfold this topic to suit himself or the occasion, irrespective of the text, if, indeed, he has one.

Let us simply say that this last definition of a topical sermon is so far afield from what we actually desire that we will eliminate it from further consideration. We will use the words analytic, textual and direct as synonyms, and synthetic, topical and indirect as synonyms, using them in their strictest sense. Doing this makes both kinds of preaching textual, at least, in the second case, to a degree.

Now, with this understanding, which form will the preacher want to use? I would advocate a balance between the use of the two of them. Surely all of us realize that variety is desirable in our preaching. No one wants to get in a rut. I would say that if we have to be in a rut, then the analytic rut would be the one to be in. There's no doubt about that. But how much more refreshing our analytic preaching will become when occasionally given a reprieve by a well-constructed synthetic sermon. The topical sermon, as the word is commonly understood, already ruled out by us, cannot hold a candle to these two more textual approaches. And then we have yet another choice, as the next section of our paper shows.

ANOTHER TYPE OF SERMON

Beyond the two major sermon methods there is one other kind of sermon we should examine. It is called the homily. Less formal than the two methods discussed thus far, it is yet, strictly speaking, the most textual. In the homily we not only follow the order of the text in assembling our materials, but draw upon each of its parts in turn in the construction of the sermon, gathering up, in our conclusion, the truths discussed into a unity which forms the climax and goal of the sermon, its so-called "final theme." A homily, therefore, will naturally have more parts than the average sermon of another type. It also requires a text suited to this kind of preaching, one which will allow a series of natural steps, one rising above the other until the top is reached.

So we have another way in which to introduce variety into our preaching. But the homily is by no means an easy way to achieve that variety. It is, without question, the most difficult of the sermon types.

If you do use this form, be careful that it doesn't degenerate into nothing more than a Sunday school lesson, in which one verse or thought after another is commented upon by the teacher. Believe me, this can happen. I can relate an experience in which, trying to use this form, a college student told me that's exactly of what my sermon reminded him. Don't allow it to become a series of little side excursions starting out in various directions from the text, necessitating jumping a gap to get back to the text again to deal with the next point. Remember that all of your thoughts should lead to the summation and be related to the theme.

Perhaps we should at least mention several other types of preaching before we close this section of the paper. Expository preaching is referred to by some. It's usually associated with longer texts and calls for much exposition or explanation. I feel, however, that it is not an additional, new sermon method, but is either identical with our analytic method or a species of it. Besides, since every sermon should be an explanation or exposition of the text, the term "expository" should not be used to designate a distinct sermon method.

Others speak of the inferential sermon. Its development consists of a series of inferences drawn from the text. Perhaps this isn't a precise enough description, but in the main this method is identical with our synthetic method. Caution against far-fetched inferences should be given. The inferences must be legitimate deductions from the text.

EXPOSITION

The preacher now has his theme and outline. He has decided upon the type of sermon he will prepare, the one best suited to his text. Now, how does he finish his sermon? It stands to reason that the work he has thus far done now forms the foundation upon which he will build. He will want the basic thoughts contained in the outline to be expanded, each unfolding in a natural way, like the petals of a flower, so that the final product possesses beauty in the whole.

The work done in faithful exegesis will now bear fruit. As the preacher proceeds with the writing of the sermon, his previous study of the text superimposed upon the outline in his mind's eye, he will find that he has ample amounts of material with which to work. In fact, in most instances he will find that he has too much to say and judicious elimination of the less important will become a necessity.

There are several things he will want to keep in mind as he elaborates upon the text.

First, explanation. There are often objects, situations, features and ways of saying things that are in the text and are foreign to our people and therefore ought to be explained. However, one must be careful not to become so wound up in explanation that the sermon becomes pedantic. Often a word or two, a sentence or two, will take care of the matter. Explanation is sermon material, quite necessary, but its quantity in the sermon should remain small.

Next we will speak of interpretation. Much of this will be self-evident from the translation arrived at during the exegesis. However, further work may be necessary so that all the thoughts of the text may be fully understood by the hearer. Interpretation often takes the form of teaching, and instruction is its general object. But the preacher is to present his interpretation in an oratorical manner. The worshipper in the pew is not to feel that he is in a schoolroom.

Permit me to quote Lenski on this point. He has a beautiful thought. "The superficial purpose of interpretation is that the hearers may enter into the thought of the text fully and grasp its entire contents mentally. But the deeper purpose is that the truth with all its saving power may be brought to the apprehension of the hearer so that it may reach his heart. The preacher's business is to clear away every obstruction, to remove any darkness, to open up the inwardness of the truth fully, and to bring out all its power."

Finally, we want to speak of appropriation. It deals with the great saving acts of God as they are recorded historically in the Scriptures. When the preacher touches upon them, he displays the value of these great works of our God for our salvation. The Holy Spirit is at work, and He enables us to make these great deeds ours by faith. Appropriation deals with saving faith, its production and its increase. Therefore the words of appropriation come from the heart of the preacher and are directed to the hearts and consciences of his hearers. It goes without saying, then, that the preacher must, with his entire heart,

appreciate and believe in the grace and salvation about which he is informing his hearers.

Interpretation leads up to appropriation and easily merges into it. We should ever hold before the eyes of our hearers the great things the Lord God has done for our salvation. These things create and strengthen faith. And finally, that's what Christian preaching is all about !

APPLICATION

Here we have another very important part of the sermon, another important part of the preacher's work. Since he is attempting to supply the spiritual needs of the hearers listening to him, application is a must. If the purpose of preaching were only to teach orthodox doctrine, preaching would hardly be necessary. Doctrine the people can get directly from the Bible, as well as from other books, especially Luther's Small Catechism. The purpose of having a living preacher in the pulpit is to bring doctrine and teaching in touch with life and living. The need for spiritual food differs from time to time. Perhaps false teachers or evil tendencies have descended upon the congregation or the community. Bad or good economic conditions may be an item that should be dealt with from the pulpit. And of course sin and grace as related to the individuals' daily life is an absolute necessity.

Because application is so important, and because it relates so closely with daily life, the preacher must be in touch with the times in which his people live and in contact with various and specific conditions in the local area. An older preacher will have to remember that times have changed somewhat since he left the seminary. A younger man will have to take into consideration the fact that the experiences of his older parishioners occurred, for the most part, in times that were somewhat different from the present. Not that he is going to change God's message to meet these varying needs, but his application of God's message will recognize such differences.

Reu lists four types of application. 1) Typical - Subject matter and doctrine are on the same plane. 2) Symbolical - Subject matter and doctrine are on a different plane. 3) Allegorical - Similar to symbolical, except that all details of the text are exploited. 4) Application of parables - Stick to the one main truth for which Jesus told the parable in the first place.

Care must be taken in application to avoid overstatements. "A true Christian is always a happy Christian." Certainly this is desirable. This is what a Christian should be. But because of our Old Adam this is simply not true and accurate. So let's not make such a statement as we strive to show our people what they can be in Christ. Or another. In application the preacher can easily slip into the rut of speaking as though his hearers still live in an unconverted state. He should never speak as though everyone in the audience lives in sin or is a hypocrite and needs to be converted. Guarding against sweeping generalities will help eliminate problems in these two areas.

Lastly we must speak once more of appropriation as it is connected with application. The texts that speak of God's great deeds and acts for our salvation must be treated differently. In them, the human actors, the mortal personages, must melt into the background, and we have to deal with what is foremost, God's work of saving mankind.

It would be a mistake to allow human persons to overshadow Christ, the supreme Person, no matter how desirable it might be to bring the thoughts of the text into a daily living situation. If we are careful in this area, aware of this, the Gospel content of our sermons could be increased to a marked degree. Allow me to give you a quick example: Take the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Ordinary application puts Lazarus into the forefront and gets this result: As Lazarus was raised from the dead, so we shall be raised at the Last Day. But when Christ is put into the forefront, the sermon will proclaim Christ as the Master of death, and bids us all believe on Him. We should watch that appropriation appears in our application when called for.

INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION

Professor Blume told us at the Seminary that if a person gets pressed for time while memorizing his sermon, he should work especially on the introduction and the conclusion, get them down pat, and then do as well in between as possible. This would indicate that these two portions of the sermon are rather important. And so they are. We will discuss them separately.

As we look at the introduction, we cannot but think of Lenski's motto, "Well begun - half done." An introduction is necessary. The preacher should not burst abruptly upon the hearer, stating his theme and charging full-speed ahead into that which he wishes to impress upon the minds of his hearers, like a bull in a china closet. The introduction should be well formulated, preparing the hearer for the subject contained in the theme. Its purpose is to incite interest, to get people settled down to listen, hear and remember. It is to form the transition between the reading of the text and the announcement of the theme. Many thoughts suggest themselves. The context and its bearing upon the text may very profitably be used here. The preacher may want to enumerate the reasons for which the text demands a certain theme. Perhaps the reason for which the theme suits the Church Year may be explored. Maybe there is some connection between the theme and some recent event of which everyone in the audience has knowledge. All of these examples will work. All are very proper. Whichever will best capture the attention of the hearers is the one to use. And I believe that from week to week variety in using different approaches is not only desirable but a must.

When writing the introduction, pursue brevity. Perhaps one and only one thought should be developed, which, like an arrow, shoots straight for its mark. And of course the mark, the bullseye for the introduction, is the presentation of the theme.

Now let's proceed to the conclusion. Here is a part of the sermon that is not really necessary. However, when done well, it can serve a very important function. If the last part of a sermon is written in such a fashion that it brings the sermon to a close, then don't add anything more. To attach a caboose to such a sermon just because you believe it to be homiletically necessary to have what is called a conclusion is a mistake. If you have finished with the last part of your sermon and it brings your thoughts to a conclusion, then by all means follow Lenski's advice and "say Amen, and depart in peace."

If, however, a conclusion is in place, then use one. Its purpose must be to gather all the statements, appeals and motives of the sermon and bring them to the hearer in their united force. In this way they will most likely make a permanent impression.

Always remember that such recapitulation should not degenerate into mere repetition. Don't preach the sermon over again. Many sermons that are preached would be improved if the repetitious endings were removed altogether.

Often a prayer will make a very suitable conclusion for a sermon. A prayer of adoration may be the best way to close a sermon which has again reminded us of the glory of our God. Hymn verses often fill this need wonderfully. A prayer of supplication may be the ticket when an overwhelming sense of imperfection and need has been awakened by the sermon. A fervent plea for divine help and comfort might be what we should hear as we close our meditation upon God's Word for that particular Sunday.

Some say that it's good, as the preacher nears the end of his sermon, that he tells the people that he is about to conclude by saying, "In conclusion," "Finally," "To sum it up," or something of the sort. Whether this is necessary or not I'm not ready to say. One comment I will make. If you use such a term, then get ready to quit. A preacher who goes on for ten more minutes having made such a statement has lost his hearers.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Someone has said, "Illustrations are the windows of an argument; they let the light in." And so in the persuasive form of public speaking we call preaching, it is understandable that their use is welcome, yes, even necessary. Fritz says, "In addressing his audience, the preacher must appeal to the intellect, the imagination and the will. The old rhetoricians speak of docere, delectare, movere. Guthrie's three Ps express the same thing: proving, painting, persuading."

When appealing to the intellect, we are not to think that we can make all the divine mysteries reasonable to our hearers. No human can do this. But we do want the words of Scripture to be understood - the meaning of the text to be grasped. And Scripture nowhere tells us that we should not, with this in mind, appeal to the intellect. The imagination, too, will help us. The preacher will appeal to it to clarify the meaning of his words, to cause his message to make an impression upon the hearer. He wants that hearer to go home from God's house with thoughts that will stick with him, with ideas that he will remember. And finally the will plays its part in moving the hearer to action. Now it goes without saying that God brings forth the action. But as the oracle of God, the preacher brings the message of God, and he should present that message in such a way that it appeals to the will of the hearer.

But why illustrations to accomplish this? Because the old saying that one picture is worth a thousand words is very nearly true. When you present a truth in such a way that it brings forth in the hearer's mind a picture with which he is well acquainted, you have the battle won. He recognizes immediately that which he knows and with which he is acquainted. And the hop, skip and jump from that to this, "Now I understand what the pastor is driving at," is a brief and quick one. So what may have taken you many words and much time to explain has all been accomplished swiftly and well by means of one well-chosen illustration. But let's remember to keep them just that - well-chosen.

There are many illustrations which we may use. A mere picturesque word may suffice. The simile or the metaphor often accomplishes the task. An anecdote or a short story might be called for. However, let's refrain from references to our own lives and anecdotes which are designed to bring a smile or a chuckle. They are not in keeping with what we are trying to do in a sermon.

DELIVERY

The writing of the sermon is the foundation for a good delivery. Therefore I'll hazard the piece of advice, rather unpopular today, that every sermon be written out. Once written, it should be fixed in the memory. Note I did not say, "memorized word for word." That may be done, if one can be free enough of the manuscript when he preaches it, and also not give the impression that his preaching is merely a reading of something from the back of his mind. Or the sermon may be memorized by paragraphs, the thought and content of the paragraph forming that which is committed to memory. Whatever is done, the goal is this, that the message comes forth freely and naturally, that speech is fluent, expressive and direct. This also helps to avoid frequent repetition of certain favorite words and phrases. But such delivery is possible only when some time and effort have been put into the manuscript, when it is pondered carefully, when certain words and phrases are underlined and used as they have been written. I guess what I'm trying to say is that there is no shortcut to the preaching of a good, well-delivered sermon.

Now when you get to the preaching style itself, you want to appear just the opposite - as though there were no such thing connected with the sermon you are preaching as a manuscript. No, this is not contradictory to what was stated in the previous paragraph. All the work involved in that part of the preparation is now in the preacher's mind and memory and he can proceed with a message that is alive and vital. Reu says, "The sermon when delivered should not make the impression of mechanical reproduction, but rather of spontaneous production." You want to hide all the work you did before entering the pulpit - but the only way you'll be able to do this is to have done that work carefully and well.

Watch your voice. Don't develop a pulpit tone. Keep your voice as natural as when speaking to these same people on the street corner. Pitch, tone and inflection should be varied. Don't fall into a singsong rhythm. Watch that the people are with you, and speak to them.

This brings up the matter of eye contact. It's a must. A person is very prone to drift off to sleep when the preacher has his head bowed constantly as he reads his sermon, or stares off into space as though he fears to look at the people as they receive his message. You're talking to them. Look at them.

That a sermon should be delivered without a single gesture is unthinkable. Don't, however, be guilty of the opposite extreme and create the impression that at any moment you may fly right out of the pulpit. Gestures, like voice, should be normal and natural, not overdone.

Putting all these things together is what makes a well-delivered interesting sermon. A good sermon can hardly be preached if it was not first well-written. However, many a well-written sermon has been ruined for the hearer by a faulty delivery. And so, at the risk of being repetitious, I'll state just once more - be yourself. Being natural will draw the hearer to you, and your message will cross the gap between pulpit and pew.

One last word. The length of the sermon is important. All of us have heard the comment that after twenty minutes you no longer have your hearers with you. As trite as it may sound, it's for the most part true. Don't go beyond that limit, certainly not regularly. Remember that there are youngsters in the congregation. Write and learn carefully, and you won't be tempted to drone on and on.

CONCLUSION

What you have read in this paper is certainly not the last word in homiletics. There are many, many subtle variations and tricky adaptations one can use. Good. This is fine. Use them. For remember, your preaching is the vehicle in which the blessed and saving Gospel truths reach your people. Especially when in the pulpit, you are the oracle of God and you are speaking the Word of salvation. Whatever will help you do this better is desirable.

Also, this paper is far too brief to adequately cover the scope of the title. It's my wish that it will provide some helpful hints and reminders for us as we go about that most important part of our work, preaching the Word of our God.

For added information there are some good materials listed in the bibliography. And that list is by no means exhaustive. There are many good source materials on this subject in print. If this paper does nothing more than move us to resolve to examine our preaching a bit more carefully, to attempt to be the best speakers we are capable of being, then it has been well worth the effort it has taken to write it. For it is His name we glorify.

Anoint them prophets. Make their ears attent
To Thy divinest speech, their hearts awake
To human need, their lips make eloquent
To gird the right and every evil break.

Amen.

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