

SECTION 11

Contemporary Models of Preaching

CONTEMPORARY MODELS/THINKING ON PREACHING (“WHERE IS PREACHING TODAY?”)

“A postmodernist is a person who calls into question most, if not all, of the assumptions that have directed the pursuit of knowledge since the time of the Enlightenment. Postmodernists are highly skeptical of the three c’s of closure, certainty, and control.”
-Danny Akin

How do preachers preach? As pulpit poets, with a kind of holy artistry, preachers image a world. They shape the newness of God's *basileia* in faith consciousness.
-(David Buttrick, *Preaching the New and the Now*, 100)

Simply put, preaching will be renewed by truth. Not by marketing, not by management, not by homiletic techniques, not by storytelling, not by biblical preaching, but by telling the truth. We will reformulate theological meaning and then tie it to true human realities. Our people, with a kind of glistening wonder, will hear, and yes, perhaps once more believe. (p. 138)

We can begin by acknowledging that “kingdom of God” is a metaphor. Will our earth be turned into an actual realm of God within anyone's lifetime? Probably not. Besides, the human world is fragile and is quite possibly scheduled for eventual phaseout. Instead, kingdom, a sociopolitical image, is a metaphor for the finished purposes of God. With regard to the where or when or how of kingdom come, we cannot say; the “somewhere, somehow” mystery of the kingdom is quite beyond human calculation. A similar endterm symbol, the idea of the second coming, also will not be fulfilled literally. Christ will not float in on a cloud to some local shopping plaza like a parachuting Santa Claus at Christmastime. God in Christ has initiated a saving work, and the second coming is a symbol of conclusion for the work God has begun in Christ Jesus.” (p. 118)

INTRODUCTION

As the Church moves into the 21st century, there is significant disagreement and confusion concerning preaching. The impact of modernity, and now post-modernity, has immersed western culture in a sea of uncertainty and instability. The foundations of rationalism and scientism have been dislodged and they now face criticism and attack similar to that which revelation encountered with the advent of the Enlightenment. The contemporary situation, from one perspective, can be summarized under “Ten Basic Features of Modernity.”

TEN BASIC FEATURES OF MODERNITY

1. **NATURALISM** - Reality is nature.
2. **HUMANISM** - The human is the highest reality and value.
3. **THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD** - Knowledge is good and the method best suited for this enterprise is observation and experimentation, the sources from which our knowledge of truth is obtained.
4. **REDUCTIONISM** - Science is the only method for gaining “true” knowledge.
5. **PROGRESS** - Because of our increase in knowledge, we are progressively overcoming the problems that have beset the human race.
6. **NATURE** - Rather than being fixed and static, nature is dynamic, growing, and developing. It is able to produce the changes in life forms through various processes of evolution (e.g. natural selection and random mutation), rather than requiring explanation in terms of a creator and intelligent designer.
7. **CERTAINTY** - Knowledge is seen as objective. This is foundationalism, the belief that it is possible to base knowledge on some sort of absolute first principles. One early model of this was found in the rationalism of Rene’ Descartes, the other was the empiricism of John Locke, the belief that there are purely objective sensory data from which knowledge can be formulated. [Postmodernism decries this is unattainable].
8. **DETERMINISM** - What happens in the universe follows from fixed causes. The scientific method discovers these laws of regularity that controlled the universe.
9. **INDIVIDUALISM** - Since truth is objective, individuals can discover truth by their own efforts. They can free themselves from the conditioning particularities of their own time and place and know reality as it is in itself.
10. **ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM** - The human is the final and most complete measure of truth. Any externally imposed authority must be subjected to scrutiny and criticism by human reason.

What does preaching, what should preaching “look like” as we move into the new millennium? Opponents of biblical/expository preaching interestingly are present on both the left and the right of the theological spectrum. From the left, persons like Buttrick and Farley challenge the notion that modern preaching must of necessity even be related to the biblical text.

“Buttrick wants to cut the connection between Scripture and the Word of God in preaching, ‘let us be willing to say boldly that it is possible to preach the Word of God without so much as mentioning the Scripture.’ He goes on to say that ‘an authority model descending from God to Christ through Scripture to sermon could lead to a terrifying arrogance that not only contradicts gospel but destroys preaching.’ What Buttrick describes as arrogance may of course represent the humility of accepting God's revelation.”

-(Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 117)

However, from within evangelicalism itself it is now argued that biblical exposition is both irrelevant and inadequate to “build a church” and meet the “felt needs” of a culture awash in the therapeutic. Biblical exposition and “seeker sensitive” are simply incompatible in the minds of many.

Interestingly, and, tragically, many contemporary evangelicals espouse similar agreements against biblical exposition that were first trumpeted years ago by the classic liberal pulpiteer Harry Emerson Fosdick.

“Every sermon should have for its main business the solving of some problem - a vital, important problem puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives...”

“And if any preacher is not doing this, even though he have at his disposal both erudition and oratory, he is not functioning at all. Many preachers, for example, indulge habitually in what they call expository sermons They take a passage from Scripture and, proceeding on the assumption that the people attending church that morning are deeply concerned about what the passage means, they spend their half hour or more on historical exposition of the verse or chapter, ending with some appended practical application to the auditors Could any procedure be more surely predestined to dullness and futility? Who seriously supposes that, as a matter of fact, one in a hundred of the congregation cares, to start with, what Moses, Isaiah, Paul or John meant in those special verses, or came to church deeply concerned about it? Nobody else who talks to the public so assumes that the vial interests of the people are located in the meaning of words spoken two thousand years ago. The advertisers of any goods, from a five foot shelf of classic books to the latest life insurance policy, plunge as directly as possible after the contemporary wants, felt needs, actual interests and concerns.”

“Only the preacher proceeds still upon the idea that folk come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites The result is that folk less and less come to church at all.”

-(“What Is The Matter With Preaching” by Harry Fosdick, Reprinted in Pulpit Digest Sept-Oct 1983)

To be fair one must recognize some truth in the analysis of Fosdick. However, what he is railing against is not expository preaching but bad preaching. Furthermore, his diagnosis is more of a misdiagnosis, and his cure is in some sense, worse than the disease he seeks to treat. Still, many have opted for alternative models of preaching, and a brief summary of the present playing field is in order.

I. TEXTUAL PREACHING - a sermon “in which both the topic and divisions of development are derived from and follow the order of the text...” (Clarence Roddy, “The Classification of Sermons” in *Homiletics*, 34). The textual sermon is often indistinguishable from the expository, with the length of the text being the only significant factor. A textual sermon is usually shorter, covering only 1 to 3 verses. Fasol notes this distinction is superficial at best (Al Fasol, “Textual Preaching” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 78). The comments of Sidney Greidanus accurately describes the issue:

“The term expository preaching cannot truly be contrasted with textual preaching or preaching on a single verse, since these terms describe preaching from different angles. Instead of contrasting these terms, therefore, one can easily combine them... Textual preaching is preaching on a biblical text and expounds the message of that text. This definition implies that all textual preaching requires not only a text but also an exposition of that text. All textual preaching is therefore understood as expository preaching.”

-(Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, 123).

II. TOPICAL PREACHING - preaching where the topic under consideration determines the text or texts. Here a preacher searches for a passage or passages that addresses the subject he wishes to address. Most topical preaching will usually be related to what the Bible has to say on the subject, though the danger of the preacher: 1) departing from the text, and 2) interjecting his own thoughts and opinions is a greater danger. Rick Warren's "verse with verse" approach to preaching is basically topical preaching. One is "free to develop the sermon without rigid adherence to the structure of the text and without the compulsion to deal fully with every verse, phrase, or word in that text." (Francis C. Rossow, “Topical Preaching” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 85). This is a popular and much favored model today.

III. DOCTRINAL PREACHING - preaching that is biblically based with the intent of expounding the doctrinal themes which arises from the text or texts being expounded. Popular in the Puritan tradition, this method seeks to convey the doctrine so that its meaning and application are driven home to the hearers. This method is not popular

today, but is much needed in a theologically illiterate church. Timothy George gives 5 suggestions to enhance this style of preaching:

1. Use confessions and catechisms to give a framework for doctrinal sermons.
2. Preach on the grand events of salvation history.
3. Prepare for the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper by sound doctrinal teaching.
4. Use great hymns of the faith to accent the theological content of the sermon.
5. Show the importance of doctrine in the lives of great biblical and church historical characters. -("Doctrinal Preaching" in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 97-98)

B.B. Warfield addressed the importance of Systematic Theology (Doctrine) and its relationship to preaching in 1897 when he wrote,

“If there be any validity at all in these remarks, the indispensableness of Systematic Theology to the preacher is obvious. For they make it clear not only that some knowledge of Christian truth is essential to him who essays to teach that truth, but that the type of life which is produced by his preaching, so far as his preaching is effective, will vary in direct relation to the apprehension he has of Christian truth and the type of proportion of truth he presents in his preaching. As Bishop Westcott puts it: ‘Error and imperfection in such a case must result in lives which are faulty and maimed where they might have been nobler and more complete’; and, on the other hand, ‘right doctrine is an inexhaustible spring of strength, if it be translated into deed.’ In directly the same line of remark that saint of God, Dr. Horatius Bonar, urges that: ‘All wrong thoughts of God, whether of Father, Son, or Spirit, must cast a shadow over the soul that entertains them. In some cases the shadow may not be so deep and cold as in others; but never can it be a trifle. And it is this that furnishes the proper answer to the flippant question so often asked: does it really matter what a man believes? All defective views of God's character tell upon the life of the soul and the peace of the conscience. We must think right thoughts of God if we would worship him as he desires to be worshipped, if we would live the life he wishes unto live, and enjoy the peace which he has provided for us.’”
-(*The Master's Seminary Journal*, Fall 1996, 246)

IV. BIOGRAPHICAL PREACHING - preaching that gives attention to the life of a biblical character. It may take the nature of expositional or topical preaching. It is always a popular model and is naturally related to the narrative style.

V. NARRATIVE PREACHING - preaching as story (not necessarily telling the story), which from beginning to end "binds the entire sermon to a single plot as theme. Here and there sub-plots, separate illustrations or precepts may punctuate or ornament the narrative, but the theme narrative stays in force all the way through from the sermon's "once-upon-a-time" until its "happy every after" (Calvin Miller, "Narrative Preaching" in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 103). This method is often associated with persons like David Buttrick, Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, and Henry Mitchell. It is an extremely popular model today, especially among mainline liberal Protestant preachers. It is, however, beginning to gain a following in evangelical churches as well. Calvin Miller notes, "typical congregations nourished on years of television dramas and popular video releases have been groomed to relate to the narrative sermon" (quoted in *Leadership*, Winter 1997, 96). Bottom line is the story, and the impact the story makes.

"If the story does not touch you, doesn't get a rise out of you, it's not going to get a rise out of anyone else. Passion communicates. The key is that the story resonates, and you are thinking about it after you leave, and the next day you are thinking about it. That means it is permeating the culture,"

(Actor Max McLean, quoted in *NetFax*, Jul 20, 1998, pg. 1).

***THE "NEW HOMILETIC"** - related to narrative preaching and growing out of the "new hermeneutic," this method has emerged in the past 25 years. Exemplified in a book like *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Abingdon, 1997) by Eugene Lowry, this is a plot-based approach to preaching that looks for "conflict" in the text and then pursues its "complications" to "sudden shift." The sermon "unfolds" finally coming together in "resolution." Like the New Hermeneutic from which it was birthed, this approach is radically existential and emphasizes the importance of decision on the part of the congregation. "In the moment of decision as he hears the Word of God proclaimed, the hearer "stands outside of himself" (*existere*, from Greek *ek + histemi*) and has the possibility of entering a new understanding of himself" (R.G. Gruenler, "The New Hermeneutic" in *EDT*, 764). Concern for authorial intent and textual meaning is not important. Meaning and significance (application) are often blurred in this style of preaching. Its strength is in the attention it gives the audience and its call for decision. As Robert Stephen Reid wrote, "The New Homiletic's interest [is] in creating an experience rather than making an argument" ("Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christiandom Congregations" *Homiletics*, Winter 1995)

CONCLUSION:

William Willimon, Dean of the chapel at Duke University, recently stated, “today’s conservatives sound like yesterday’s liberals.” In a fascinating article titled “Been there, preached that.” (*Leadership*, Fall 1995) Willimon sounds a prophetic warning to evangelicals, that they might not be seduced by the sirens of modernity and follow the path of tragic insignificance which mainline denominations have trod.

“I’m a mainline-liberal-Protestant-Methodist-type Christian. I know we’re soft on Scripture. Norman Vincent Peale has exercised a more powerful effect on our preaching than St. Paul...”

I know we play fast and loose with Scripture. But I’ve always had this fantasy that somewhere, like in Texas, there were preachers who preached it all, Genesis to Revelation, without blinking an eye...

I took great comfort in knowing that, even while I preached a pitifully compromised, “Pealed” -down gospel, that somewhere, good old Bible-believing preachers were offering their congregations the unadulterated Word, straight up. Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than liberal mainliners? At the very time those of us in the mainline, oldline, sidelined were repenting of our pop psychological pap and rediscovering the joy of disciplined biblical preaching, these “biblical preachers” were becoming “user friendly” and “inclusive,” taking their homiletical cues from the “felt needs” of us “boomers” and “busters” rather than the excruciating demands of the Bible.

I know why they do this... It all starts with American Christians wanting to be helpful to the present order, to be relevant (as the present order defines relevance). We so want to be invited to lunch at the White House or at least be interviewed on ‘Good Morning America.’ So we adjust our language to the demands of the market, begin with the world and its current infatuations rather than the Word and its peculiar judgments on our infatuations. If you listen to much of our preaching, you get the impression that Jesus was some sort of itinerant therapist who, for free, traveled about helping people feel better. Ever since Fosdick, we mainline liberals have been bad about this. Start with some human problem like depression; then rummage around in the Bible for a relevant answer. Last fall, as I was preparing in my office for the Sunday service, the telephone rang. ‘Who’s preaching in Duke Chapel today?’ asked a nasal, Yankee-sounding voice.

I cleared my throat and answered, ‘The Reverend Doctor William Willimon. ‘Who’s that?’ asked the voice. ‘The Dean of the Chapel,’ I answered in a sonorous tone. ‘I hope he won’t be preaching politics. I’ve had a rough week and I need to hear about God. My Baptist church is so eaten up with politics, I’ve got to hear a sermon!’ When you have to come to a Methodist for a biblical sermon, that’s pitiful.”

Preaching at the End of the 20th Century: New enthusiasm, growing concern

By Michael Duduit

It has not been many years since many scholars and denominational leaders were delivering eulogies for preaching. The death of preaching was announced primarily in mainline churches but found its advocates among Southern Baptists as well. Preaching was no longer an effective way to reach a secular generation, these ecclesiastical prophets declared. New means - pastoral care, small groups, social ministries - were the future; preaching was the past. A number of seminaries no longer required homiletics as part of a basic theological education.

As so often happens when the “experts” predict future events, that future took an unexpected turn. The obituary for preaching, it seems, was a bit premature.

The last decade has seen an explosion of interest in preaching within the church - both evangelical and mainline. We have observed a remarkable increase in the volume of books published as well as the number of periodicals and resources available for preachers. Churches where preaching is emphasized, effective and biblically-based have grown significantly, many becoming the “mega-churches” which are a major topic of interest today. Even Roman Catholic seminaries - where homiletics received little attention in previous generations - have begun to rediscover the importance of training clergy who are competent preachers. The Odyssey cable-TV network (formerly the Faith and Values Channel, of which ACTS is a part) has even begun a weekly program called “Great Preachers.” All of these events and trends illustrate that preaching is still going strong as a vital element of ministry and mission in the local church. Indeed, one would be hand pressed to find a dynamic, growing church in which preaching is not a major element of the congregation's life and worship. No matter what other ministry activities they may provide, churches do not thrive without effective preaching.

Nevertheless, all is not roses in the homiletical garden. In his book *What Americans Believe* (Regal Books, 1991), George Barna points out survey results which demonstrate that preaching receives relatively low marks from more than half of all regular church attenders in the U.S. For example, only two age groups rated preaching in their own local church as “excellent”: the 55-64 age group (60%) and 65 or older (56%). Only 37% of the 45-54 age group said the same about their preacher, along with 46% of the 18-25 group and 40% of the 26-44 group.

Other results from the same survey raise concern as well. Only 40% of men give high marks to preaching in their own church; women are slightly more positive (47%). College graduates are similarly negative (39%) as are persons with income ranges of \$40,000-59,000 (39%) and \$60,000 and up (36%). A thin majority of evangelicals (51%) think they hear excellent preaching, compared to 42% of mainline Protestants and 34% of Catholics.

Perhaps these results help us better understand why some churches are growing while the majority of congregations (including Southern Baptist ones) are plateaued or in decline. Few churches will surpass their level of preaching.

So as we approach a new millennium, the church finds itself with a renewed interest in quality preaching, while a majority of church-goers detect a need for improvement in the preaching that takes place in their own church. Where do we go from here?

Learning from those who excel

For nearly 13 years I have served as edit (of *Preaching* magazine, a bi-monthly professional journal which focuses o preaching and worship leadership During those years I have been blessed with the opportunity to sit in the studio of many of our nation's finest, most effective preachers and conduct interview about their own perspectives on our common task. The first ten years of interviews were recently released by Bake Books under the title *Communication With Power*.

Through those interviews and other encounters with contemporary preaching giants, I've formed some conclusion about the state of preaching today, and how it can grow in quality and effectiveness. Some of these observations seer obvious, yet they seem to be overlooked in much of the preaching that occurs in our churches.

Preaching must be driven by Scripture

Few pastors would want to be identified as “non-biblical,” yet in too many sermons, the biblical text plays a periphery role at best -- offering a “jumping off” spot for presenting the preacher’s personal views or concepts drawn from recent self-help books.

That is one reason there has been growing interest in expository preaching Expository preaching is a general sate gory characterized by one thing: the sermon is driven and shaped by the text (in contrast to the topical sermon, which is driven by the topic.)

Many preachers and homiletician incorrectly caricature such preaching a “verse-by-verse” or as dull, irrelevant Bible studies. In recent years, however, with the help of scholars like Haddon Robinson

(whose book *Biblical Preaching* is a classic that’s still widely-used) and more recently Bryan Chapell (author of *Christ-Centered Preaching*, a superb text), expository preaching is being recognized as a broad category allowing a variety of sermon models and approaches.

Effective expository preaching is based in and shaped by a specific biblical text. It not only provides necessary information about the text it also explores the eternal principles contained in the text and puts an emphasis on applying the text to the needs and concerns of real people, demonstrating the relevance of those biblical principles for contemporary situations and issues. Expository sermons may assume a “verse-by-verse” shape as the preacher progresses through a single biblical book, but that does not represent a majority of contemporary practitioners. Expository sermons may be deductive or inductive; they may be propositional or narrative. The guiding rule is that they take their ideas and form from the text.

I am convinced that an expanded use of expository preaching - guided by the insights of Robinson, Chapell and others - will produce a significant interest and satisfaction among those who sit in our pews. God does not promise to honor our sermons, but He does promise to honor His Word. Does it make sense to base our sermons on anything else?

Preaching must have a contemporary focus

In his book *Between Two Worlds*, John Stott insists that the preacher must build a bridge between the biblical world and the contemporary world. While our sermons should be shaped by the biblical text, it is also important that they not stay in that ancient context. Today's effective preachers know that they must carry those biblical principles into the contemporary setting in which the congregation lives.

Millions of American homes now have the ultimate in "choice" in the form of a television remote control. As families sit in the family room before the TV, someone sits in the comfort of the easy chair and clicks away from channel to channel, selecting something to watch while passing over dozens of channels. (The master of the remote is often the dad, who can cruise 60 channels in about 8.5 seconds, on average!) If something doesn't catch the attention of the TV watcher, that remote allows us to effortlessly move on. That's one reason why many situation comedies now move directly from the end of one program to the opening of the next with out commercials or credits. They want to involve you in the next program immediately before you have the chance to "cruise away" to another channel.

Now imagine the contemporary congregation as full of people holding remote controls, each pointed at the pulpit. They are looking at the preacher and saying, "Get my attention now. Get me involved now, or I'll be mentally moving to something else." We cannot ignore the fact we live in an impatient culture - a fact that affects every element of society, including preaching. That does not mean we alter the Gospel message, but it does impact the methodology by which we communicate that message. The implication is that as we preach, we must not simply offer a well-prepared history lesson; rather, we must find ways to let scripture speak to contemporary culture. Effective preaching demonstrates that God's revealed truth is vitally relevant in the lives of men and women at the end of the 20th century.

How do preachers do that?

How do they involve and engage listeners in this culture?

One major method is through the use of strong, contemporary illustration. As preachers seek to translate abstract concepts into concrete realities, it is essential that we find effective ways to illustrate those truths in terms that are understandable to the non-literary generations that are entering our sanctuaries.

That may mean quoting Seinfeld instead of Shakespeare; telling a story from "Star Wars" rather than sharing a poetic passage from the 19th century. When you refer to Calvin or Hobbes, listeners don't think of a theologian or a philosopher; they immediately picture a little boy and his toy tiger. In an age when music ten years old is a "golden oldie," preachers must increasingly draw illustrative material from the culture in which people live today.

Listen to today's most effective preachers and you'll note a major emphasis on compelling illustrations with a contemporary ring. Missionary stories are giving way to illustrations taken from everyday life experiences. Sermon titles (and series themes) speak to concerns that seem to touch the lives and concerns of those in the pew. For example, Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Houston, preached a series on Ecclesiastes and entitled it, "Been There. Done That. Now What?" (drawing on the popular phrase used among younger adults). One reason that series was so successful was

that it spoke to eternal needs in a contemporary way, including some wonderful illustrations taken directly from the life of that church. Another popular tool in preaching today is an emphasis on story. In recent years, both evangelical and mainline homiletics have encouraged preachers in the use of narrative sermons (in contrast to the more traditional deductive or propositional models). While the wholesale advocacy of narrative and inductive approaches is beginning to slow in many quarters, even more deductive preachers are recognizing anew the value of story in preaching. Story can be used to enliven such sermons and to illustrate biblical truths in a compelling fashion. What they rarely do is replace entirely a more propositional approach to preaching -- particularly in growing churches.

Yet another tool in effective preaching today is the use of powerful contemporary application. Today's most gifted preachers are crafting sermons that give enormous time and energy to providing practical and timely insights about how to take biblical truths and put them to work in daily life.

Rick Warren, pastor of the remarkable Saddleback Community Church in Southern California, suggests that the sermon outline itself be constructed so that every major point in the message is stated in the form of some application of the central idea of the text. The result of such an approach is that application is woven throughout the sermon rather than leaving it for a few brief thoughts at the end of the point or even the sermon itself. Congregations today - both believers and non-believers - aren't coming to our churches for ancient history lessons or short courses in Greek grammar. As Fosdick once commented, people don't come to church with a burning desire to know whatever happened to the Jebusites. They come hungry for knowing how God's Word can help them save their family, survive their job, keep their kids off drugs and keep their lives together from paycheck to paycheck.

If I go to the doctor complaining of chest pains, I don't want him to spend my time discussing the history of the study of chest pain, evaluating Greek and Latin terms for pain. I want him to tell me what's wrong and what I can do about it. God's word provides the truths that can heal and save everyone. Our job, as proclaimers of the Word, is to uncover those principles and share them with our people in a way they can understand and put into action in their own lives.

That doesn't mean surrendering to a preaching schedule based on "felt needs" or the latest therapeutic trends. It means allowing scripture to demonstrate that people's "felt needs" are based on deeper needs and that God's Word reveals the good news that Jesus Christ can meet every need. Preaching must be the priority in ministry. Today's pastors struggle with incredible pressures on their time and energy. They serve as counselors, administrators, teachers, schedulers, bus drivers, mediators and on and on. Oh, yes, they are also preachers.

Great preaching doesn't begin on Saturday evening. It doesn't even begin on Monday morning. Talk to today's most effective preachers and they'll tell you powerful sermons begin with a commitment to preaching as the top priority in their ministry. And they begin months ahead of time in planning.

Making a commitment to preaching requires balancing an assortment of good things to protect time for the most important thing. It takes time management and sometimes produces conflict. But come Sunday morning, a congregation will sense the difference as they hear the Word unfolded before them in a compelling manner.

Another common characteristic of most effective preachers is use of a preaching plan.

Many take time each summer to plan the entire year ahead; others will plan six months out or perhaps three months. But they do plan. The result is reduced stress, an opportunity to gather resources for months and an opportunity to coordinate sermons and series to produce maximum impact.

William Hinson, pastor of Houston's First Methodist Church, plans his year's Sunday morning preaching schedule each summer, then creates a file folder for every sermon. Whenever he comes across an idea, a story or some item that relates to a specific sermon ahead, he clips or copies it and drops it in the right folder. When the week arrives to prepare that sermon, his normal problem is that he has too much material at hand! It happens because of planning.

When we commit ourselves to making proclamation of God's Word the priority of our ministry, we will find it makes a remarkable difference in the sermons we present. Arid in our own joy and satisfaction with preaching.

As the church moves into a third Christian millennium, preaching may well be moving into a new "golden age." While there are fewer "pulpit princes" known across the nation, I believe there are many more effective preachers today - preaching powerful biblical messages in an engaging way - than in any other time in our nation's history. The 21st century can and should be marked by preaching that boldly proclaims the truths of God's Word and transforms lives in extraordinary ways.

Michael Dudit, editor of Preaching magazine, is Executive Vice President at Union University in Jackson, TN.