PREACHING TO THE UNCONVERTED

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Evangelistic preaching does not just belong at large rallies or outreach events. It is not necessary to stand on street corners, or to broadcast your sermons over the supermarket public address system, or to go to a far-flung 'unreached' tribe to find people in need of convincing of the gospel’s truth and relevance. They are sitting right there in your church pews. Every time you preach, the likelihood is that you are preaching to the unconverted.

In this issue, we are exploring the incredible opportunity to extend the Kingdom from the pulpit. It isn't a specialist sub-section of the preaching ministry; it is something all preachers need to get good at. As Michael Green writes in his feature, 'There is a crying need for us to emerge from our dugouts and strain every energy to pass on to others with love and enthusiasm the good news which has transformed our own lives.'

Looking ahead, our next issue will be celebrating the Christian legacy of Her Majesty the Queen, who turns 90 in 2016. A patron of LPMA, the charity from which LWPT was birthed, the Queen’s faith has been the foundation of her reign, with far reaching implications for our nation and the wider world. In thinking about how she has used her platform for good, we’ll be reflecting on our own influence and the legacy we hope to leave.

Have a very happy Christmas one and all.

IN THIS ISSUE, WE ARE EXPLORING THE INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO EXTEND THE KINGDOM FROM THE PULPIT.

Jo Swinney
Editor
Preach is a quarterly magazine produced by the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust. In each issue you can expect to find:

- features from a wide-range of highly regarded practitioners and academics on the craft, content and context of preaching
- interviews and opinion pieces
- book reviews
- analysis of the sermon styles of great historical preachers
- advice on preaching related problems
- help with communication skills
- ideas and resources for service planning and leading

“A WELL-PRODUCED AND HELPFUL MAGAZINE. I HAVE BEEN A PREACHER FOR MANY YEARS NOW AND I WOULD SAY THAT PREACH IS ONE OF THE MOST USEFUL PUBLICATIONS FOR PREACHERS I HAVE EVER RECEIVED. THE FEATURE ARTICLES AND REGULAR ITEMS GIVE THE MAGAZINE WELL-BALANCED CONTENT.”

Owen Gardener

“A FRESH AND EXCITING ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ANYONE WITH A GENUINE CONCERN FOR MINISTRY.”

Bob Weir

“I SO APPRECIATE HAVING SUCH A VARIETY OF ARTICLES TO EXPLORE. I ALSO VERY MUCH LIKE THE INNOVATIVE DESIGN AND LAYOUT – THIS IS A MAG THAT SAYS “PICK ME UP AND LOOK INSIDE”.

Alethe Virgin

Preach is available in print or digital format. To sign up, please visit preachweb.org/preach-magazine or call the office on 01923 231811 to request a form.
Here is your opportunity to celebrate and affirm the importance of the sermon. We are seeking submissions from all over the UK, from any denomination, and in two categories: under 21 and 21 and over. We are looking for a written sermon of between 1,000 and 2,000 words on the topic of “Reason for Hope.” Entries must be received by midnight on December 31st 2015.

The top ten entries will be published, and you will be offered the chance to be mentored by a more experienced preacher. The top two in each category will deliver their sermon live to a panel of experts and an audience, with the winner receiving the chance of a year’s free study at LST, and the runner up a preaching resources pack and free entrance to a preaching conference.

Entries should be sent by email to: sermon@lst.ac.uk
Or post to: Sermon Of The Year, London School of Theology, Green Lane, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2UW
For full terms and conditions visit www.lst.ac.uk/SOTY
The plus of the Spirit

Twenty years ago I completed a course in homiletics as part of ministerial training. That course has had a huge impact on my preaching over the years.

Clearly, I’ve learnt many things about preaching in the past 20 years. Nonetheless, three lessons I learnt back then have never been surpassed:

- If you can’t express in a single sentence what your sermon is about, neither can your congregation.
- Inspiration and perspiration are equally important elements of sermon preparation.
- You can never entirely account for the ‘plus of the Spirit’ but prayerful preachers should expect it.

The ‘plus of the Spirit’ is a way of describing that phenomenon whereby a sermon has an impact beyond that which the preacher could anticipate.

Sometimes the ‘plus of the Spirit’ may be as evident to the preacher as to the congregation. In such instances preachers may feel especially enabled by the Spirit, and words on a page become words of life.

Far more often in my experience, the ‘plus of the Spirit’ is not immediately evident to the preacher. When a person thanks you for saying something in a sermon which you cannot remember saying, or was at best a throwaway comment, but which for that listener was the most profound element of your sermon, you have experienced the ‘plus of the Spirit’.

On numerous occasions I have preached what I thought was a poor sermon only to discover later how deeply it connected with the congregation. I can only conclude that somewhere between my speaking and the congregation’s hearing, the ‘plus of the Spirit’ transformed feeble and mediocre words into words of life.

As I reflect on the importance of the ‘plus of the Spirit’ two things strike me. The first is how important it is that preachers’ words are in fact infused by the Spirit’s power. Our words, despite inspiration and perspiration, are of limited value. It is only by the Spirit’s enabling that familiar words, truths, and scriptures can cause our hearts to burn within us. Therefore, sermon preparation must be preceded and succeeded by prayer to the One who alone has the capacity to transform human hearts.

The second is how common it is for contemporary preachers to have little or no expectation that God might actually infuse our words with divine power.

‘I’ve sat through far too many sermons which are homiletically unimpeachable, intellectually unassailable, doctrinally inoffensive, and logically unobjectionable, but which nevertheless have indiscernible impact on the hearers and have left me feeling utterly unmoved. But equally, I’ve heard sermons which would gain poor marks in a preaching class but which, nonetheless, have more than a whiff of the Spirit about them.

If I have one desire for preachers today it is that we would be more intentional about seeking the ‘plus of the Spirit’. If preachers truly seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who alone has the words of life, I suggest that we must both pray for and plan for preaching which elicits a response to the prompting of the Spirit.

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Rev Dr Calvin Samuel

Rev Dr Calvin Samuel is a Methodist minister, currently serving as Academic Dean of St John’s College and Director of Wesley Study Centre, Durham, a Methodist theological college located within Durham University.
The doubtful evangelist

FINDING CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL

by Michael Green
Evangelism simply means telling good news, and who would not want to do that? You would think the answer would be ‘no one’. But as I survey the Christian landscape I see very little of that joyful and intentional telling good news to people who are increasingly ignorant of it or hostile to it.
most preachers operate only within the four walls of their church building. Even there, most do not ever preach for a decision. Many preachers have never seen an adult conversion, let alone a Muslim or a Hindu coming to Christian faith. There is a crying need for us to emerge from our dugouts and strain every energy to pass on to others with love and enthusiasm the good news which has transformed our own lives. So I am delighted that this issue of Preach is devoted to evangelistic preaching: telling good news about Jesus Christ to people who do not know him, but badly need him. The particular angle I have been asked to write about is the doubts of the preacher, doubts which may inhibit us from direct evangelism or may cause us to sell it short because we are embarrassed or afraid of other people’s reaction. Doubt is a ball and chain around the beautiful feet of those who are called to bring good news!

To doubt is human. There are very few things about which we can have absolute certainty; indeed the philosophers would remind us that proof resides only in refined areas of logic and mathematics. For the most part we have to operate on the basis of assurance based on good evidence. Thus you cannot prove that your mother loves you. You cannot prove that the sun will rise tomorrow. Nor can you prove that gospel preaching will be effective. But there is sufficient evidence to believe all three.

Sufficient evidence can give rise to solid confidence. There is sufficient evidence for the reliability of the resurrection of Jesus, as Paul proclaimed in the market place at Athens (see Acts chapters 17 and 18). There are many areas of Christian belief where we may have justifiable doubts, but they do not include these two central areas of Jesus and the resurrection. The worldwide impact of Jesus down the centuries, his teaching, his lifestyle, his miracles, his fulfilment of prophecies uttered centuries before, his claims, and his death all validate the uniqueness of Jesus. However many doubts we may have on peripheral issues, it is hard for a true Christian to harbour doubts about the identity of Jesus. It is the same with the resurrection. Hard though it is to believe, the evidence for it is massive: Jesus’ appearances to such a varied group of people, the empty tomb, the transformed lives of disciples then and down the centuries, the launch of the Christian movement, the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, both of them rooted in the cross and resurrection, together with the breadth and very early date of the testimony – all validate this central tenet of the Christian faith. If we are not confident about Jesus and the resurrection we have no message for unbelievers and...
Michael Green

Michael Green is the author of more than 50 books, mostly on the twin subjects of evangelism and apologetics. His career has included ordained ministry in the Church of England, being the Principal of St John's College, Nottingham, and advisor to the Archbishop of Canterbury on evangelism among other positions. He officially retired in 1996.

THE EVANGELIST’S DOUBTS

If there is strong and sufficient evidence for the core of the good news with which we are entrusted, there are several areas where doubts will inevitably affect the evangelist. 

DOUBTS ABOUT MY OWN ABILITY

Honest self-assessment is sure to reveal that we are not particularly skilful with words, well enough read in the Bible, gifted in the art of persuasion, up-to-date with contemporary illustrations and the like. This is a temptation of the devil who wants to keep us gagged. Of course I am not competent to do this well, but the amazing thing is that when I launch out and expect God to act, he does. After all, whose job is it to convict of sin, or to make Christ really winsome, or to enable the hearers to say ‘Jesus is Lord’? That is the work of God’s Holy Spirit. The Lord is not looking for perfect communicators, but for men and women who are fired up with the good news and are prepared to have a go at sharing it, whatever the outcome.

DOUBTS ABOUT DOCTRINE

There will inevitably be times when we are dealing with a topic on which Christians who love the Bible have different views – such as other faiths, baptism and hell. It is important to be transparently honest. We cannot preach with confidence something we are not sure about. Take, for example, the future of those who reject Christ, while others believe they will be annihilated. But on any showing Jesus makes it abundantly plain that those who willfully reject his offer of rescue miss out on what they were made for, and face ultimate shipwreck. You do not need to publicise your own doubts on these alternatives.

DOUBTS ABOUT RESPONSE

The evangelist is in a lonely position, prone to either elation or despair. It is important to remember the sovereignty of God. It is his message, not ours. Our job is to be faithful messengers. We can leave the outcome in his hands. If we are too anxious about it, it may well be a form of egoism: we want to appear good because of a large response. But the response is always in God’s hands, even as we must make the issues clear and call for response. That is why I am a Calvinist on my knees before an evangelistic event, and an Arminian when I am calling people to respond. I have now been in evangelism long enough not to be so prey to these incapacitating doubts about response. I know that God will draw people to himself when it is his time for them. I do not know whom he will touch or how many they will be. But like Wesley I ‘offer them to Christ’ and expect to see response in some at least. If I see nothing over a considerable period, I need to ask myself hard questions as to why, because the word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12).

DOUBTS ABOUT THE SEQUEL

The nurture of new believers is crucial. Who would bring babies into the world and not nurture them? But I have strong doubts about the capacity of some churches and Christian Unions to take proper care of new believers. Such doubts are commendable! Accordingly I will not preach for decision where no preparation has been made for after-care. And I do offer a nurture course to local churches and CUs to help new Christians to mature! Jesus covets not decisions but disciples.
In conversation with Amy Orr-Ewing

AMY ORR-EWING
is Director of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (rzim.eu) and Director of Programmes for the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics (theocca.org). She is a passionate exponent of a rational Christian response to many of the pressing cultural issues of the day, bringing her formidable theological knowledge to bear on a wide variety of subjects. She has written two books exploring key questions in apologetics: Why Trust the Bible? and But Is It Real? (both IVP 2008).
You grew up in a Christian family. Can you tell me a little about that?

Neither of my parents were Christians when I was born. They were both academics and my father was raised in a very atheistic home where there was strictly no Bible and no talking about God. My grandfather was a scientist. My father was dramatically converted through a vision of Jesus, in his study – a really amazing divine intervention into our family. My mum became a Christian about six months later. As a child I saw them transition from the position that God is totally irrelevant, to seeing them completely change their lives to follow Jesus. My dad gave up his job and became a church planter and an evangelist.

As a child I experienced both the reality of Jesus and his presence and the change that he brings, and the involvement in evangelism that was just a very natural part of our whole family.

My childhood faith included both the intellectual side of faith, and the encouragement to ask and pursue questions. When people talk about growing up in a ‘Christian home’, I’ve come to realise that mine wasn’t a standard experience.

When, how and why did you get involved in defending the Christian faith?

The first person I led to Christ was my friend when we were six years old – we are still friends now. That made two of us who were Christians in our class. Even as a child, I had to make a stand. Halloween comes around and ‘No, we’re not going to do witches’, or people are swearing, and you’re different. There was definitely a sense of defending the faith, even in primary school. And then in secondary school, my best friend became a Christian on the bus on our way home from school on the first day, and then she and I became involved in helping to lead the Christian Union in our school. So I don’t really have any memory of a Christian faith without there being both a defensive and a proactive element to sharing it.

Amy speaks and lectures on Christian apologetics worldwide, at events such as Keswick and Alpha International, and on University campuses including Oxford, Cambridge, Vienna, and Hong Kong. Amy has been invited to speak in the White House, and on Capitol Hill, as well as the Speakers Rooms in the UK Parliament. Amy and her husband Frog lead a church in Buckinghamshire called Latimer Minster, which they planted in 2010.
This is what you do professionally now – sharing and defending the faith. Can you tell me a little about that and what you do?

Now I’m involved in apologetics and evangelism, and trying to reach people who aren’t in church, or who aren’t even nominally Christian. We all know people who are in that category, who just aren’t ‘churchy’ people. There are steps on the way to seeing them come to faith and some of those steps are answering their questions or objections, and so part of my work over the last seventeen years has been giving talks, helping lead a team and identifying and raising up a team to do that, but also writing books and resources that help address some of those questions that we all face.

You’ve obviously come into contact with many people of different faiths and no faith, and you must have come into contact with their objections and questions. Could you tell me a bit about some of the key questions and objections that you’ve encountered over the years, and whether those have changed?

There are some questions that continually come up and haven’t changed, such as questions about science and faith or questions about suffering. In the last five years there have been more questions around the moral character of God, around the idea that belief in God is dangerous or religion causes violence. I think that’s due to two things: firstly, the rise of militant Islam – people see serious religious ideology, people passionate about their faith committing violence, therefore they think any passionate religious commitment will lead to violence. Secondly, New Atheists have been identifying the moral character of God in the Bible as a reason to disbelieve in God. There have also been more questions about how we live, particularly around sex and sexuality than there were a few years ago.

What are some of the challenges that you’ve come into contact with personally, when defending the faith?

That is a good question! Obviously there are the intellectual challenges we just talked about – the potency of some of the questions, but I think increasingly one of the challenges is the disillusionment and disconnect with what people hoped faith might offer, and what they actually see and experience. That can take different forms – in very charismatic settings people grow tired and weary of the promise of revival around the corner, or the idea that everyone will be healed if you have enough faith. I think if you do grow up in that culture, as you get older, you experience disappointment and suffering, and there isn’t a narrative for that in some charismatic churches. People can feel that it’s God who’s let them down, rather than that particular theology.

Do you have an example of where you’ve been in a speaking context and you’ve come into contact with a particularly hostile or tricky audience, and how did you overcome that?

Because of the nature of what I do, I would expect to encounter some hostility. I can think of an example just over a year ago when I was in a particular university leading a mission week, and at the first event we had quite a hostile atheist, quite aggressive, quite verbal, really going for it in attack-dog mode. I don’t actually find that particularly difficult and in fact, that individual became a...
On the flip side, what have you got a story where there’s been a really positive outcome after speaking?

On the flip side, what have you got a story where there’s been a really positive outcome after speaking?

By and large through, if we expect some hostility when the gospel is preached, as well as people to respond positively, and we emotionally prepare for that in advance, then it’s ok. I don’t take it personally, even though they may be attacking me. I’m going to do everything I can to be gentle, respectful and loving, and to show Jesus’ love in how I would even respond in a situation like that. That often then turns things around.

On the flip side, what have been some of the most encouraging things about defending the faith? Do you have a story where there’s been a really positive outcome after speaking?

Oh gosh – well there would be lots of those! I try to call for a response when I preach the gospel, and to expect that there will be people who will want to say yes to Jesus. My experience is that, by and large, that is the case and sometimes there are lots of them, which can be surprising. One example of a positive outcome that I can give was when I was speaking to a company in London, which I probably can’t name, in a corporate setting and gave the opportunity for people to respond. There were more people there than anticipated so we couldn’t do what we usually do, which is to allow people to feed back in written form, so I didn’t know how many people had prayed the prayer of commitment. However, a few weeks later, at another event, a lady came and told one of my colleagues that she became a Christian at that event where I was speaking, and she committed her life to the Lord in her own workplace.

Have you got any practical advice for someone who really wants to engage in defending the faith? First up, in a personal context, amongst friends or family and then maybe someone who potentially wants to step out in to ministry and do that as more of a vocation?

I would say that it’s a good idea to get equipped, so to get to a point of some confidence to begin to answer people’s questions and to ask questions too. We have a lot of resources to help people do that. Our team have written apologetics books. I’ve written Why Trust the Bible? and But is it Real? There’s Vince [Vitale]’s book, Why Suffering? and Sharon [Dirckx]’s Why? and John Lennox’s books on science and faith. Read around quite broadly. I don’t think that has to be a really arduous task. I think you can read five or six of our resources and have quite a good basic foundation to be able to engage with people in conversation. If you want to go deeper we have the RZIM Academy where you can listen to lectures and write assignments and be part of a community going deeper into these things. I think if you sense a calling into a preaching/apologetics ministry I would advise taking the time to do some study, maybe coming to the OCCA for a year and exploring that calling. I can’t overemphasise the importance of being around leaders who create opportunity for others. For me, it was my dad who first asked me to preach when I was a teenager. Pray that God opens those opportunities too.

For leaders, be thinking ‘who are the people around that I could be developing and who have potential? Often we see people who are like ourselves, and most preachers are male, so often my experience has been that women aren’t necessarily seen as potential defenders of the faith or apologists and that’s something we’re really trying to change here at RZIM.

Have you found that being a woman has been a hindrance in the area of apologetics, which is predominantly male-dominated?

It’s probably been a mixture of experiences and things are different from seventeen years ago, when I started. At the beginning it was probably harder as a woman, because there’s a whole sector of churches that wouldn’t have you preach. Even in university evangelism there just weren’t women missioners back then. But my experience has been that where doors have opened and people have felt that what was delivered was good, it’s been an advantage being a woman because you break stereotypes. Creative inviters might think ‘well people are going to expect a man, so having a woman might actually help us, as long as the level is right’. In our organisation I was the first woman speaker on staff internationally, and I’m really thankful to Ravi for taking that step. It wasn’t easy all the time for him, that decision. Now, in our organisation, I don’t think it is harder if you’re a woman. I hope not!

What are you most looking forward to, both in terms of your own ministry, and RZIM, but also globally in terms of everything that’s going on around the world to push forward evangelism and apologetics?

One of the things I’m really excited about is seeing the next generation rise up. Reboot (reboot.org.uk) was born out of the dream to equip young people, and the realisation that young people are on the absolute frontlines in their schools and in those settings. Eleven and twelve year olds are and can be and should be doing apologetics! I think that’s really thrilling and that’s something that we’re seeing globally.

Ruth Jackson

Ruth Jackson is media officer for OCCA and RZIM. She was previously working in television, largely at BBC’s Blue Peter. The daughter of a vicar, Ruth has been involved in youth work and church planting for as long as she can remember. In her spare time, she is a rock-star bassist.
Reason for hope

HOW TO PREACH APOLOGETICALLY

by Chris Sinkinson
In many ways it was a very good sermon on the account in Joshua of the fall of the walls of Jericho. The preacher explained the text well, related the events to salvation history and gave an encouraging application. Jesus is our Joshua. He is our deliverer. The walls of opposition to the gospel are sure to be destroyed if we are on the Lord’s side.
But something was not right. With the violent campaigns of ISIS making headline news through the week leading up to this Sunday, how could we have a sermon on the fall of Jericho without tackling the obvious objection: Does God promote jihad or holy war? And given the frequent claims of mainstream television documentaries, is it not the case that the ancient ruins of Jericho had already collapsed long before the supposed time of Joshua? The sermon may have been eloquent and biblical but it was not persuasive to the changing culture in which we live.

It is not simply the case that the Bible contains apologetics, the Bible itself is an apologetic. It is a sustained case for the faithfulness of God in salvation.

An Apology for Preaching

Apologetics is the practice of dealing with objections and presenting the case for the faith. In a very well-known verse by Peter we read, ‘Always be prepared to give an answer (apologia) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have’ (1 Peter 3:15). Peter is not describing a Christian specialism or an unusual task. Apologetics would have been part of ordinary evangelism and preaching in the early church. The Greek word is taken from the world of the law court (Acts 22:1; 24:10; 25:17; 26:1) but it was readily applied more generally to ministry (Philippians 1:7; 16; 2 Timothy 4:16–17).

The Bible itself provides numerous forms of apologetics. Examples of the lawsuit genre abound among the prophets (Isaiah 40–55) and in wisdom literature (Job 38–41). Luke deliberately follows the legal requirement of identifying a twofold witness for claims that he makes (following Deuteronomy 19:15) as he draws evidence together for Theophilus (Luke 1:1–4). John assembles a selection of signs to prove his claim that Jesus is the Messiah (John 20:30–31). Paul bases his proclamation of the resurrection of Christ on relevant eyewitness evidence (1 Corinthians 15:3–8). It is not simply the case that the Bible contains apologetics, the Bible itself is an apologetic. It is a sustained case for the faithfulness of God in salvation.

Perhaps one reason why apologetics has been seen as a special interest subject is because we have lived in an era of shared presuppositions. Our congregation may have included non-Christians but they probably shared a common knowledge of Bible stories, a respect for biblical values, and openness to the existence of God. Only a few decades ago we were preaching in a Christian culture even if most of the population were not Christians. Now that has changed. There is hostility to biblical values in the air, an ignorance of Bible stories and a presumption in favour of atheism among many. It is as if we have moved from the world where Peter preached in Acts 2 (Jerusalem) into the world where Paul preached in Acts 17 (Athens). Exciting, isn’t it?

Read the Text Through Other Eyes

In a pluralist culture we are more aware of worldviews. Everyone has a worldview but we are not usually conscious of them. NT Wright describes their function: ‘They are that through which, not at which, a society or individual normally looks; they form the grid according to which humans organise reality’. A worldview informs what we find plausible, laughable and tasteful. When the newly elected leader of the British Liberal Democrat party admitted in a news interview that he prayed, the interviewer clearly saw this as an opportunity to try and make him uncomfortable. Only two decades ago it would have been quite normal for any public figure to acknowledge that they prayed; today this is supposed to be an embarrassing admission. Contemporary culture has led to the fragmentation of worldviews and a loss of any shared perspective.
Preachers need to grasp this point. As they study and prepare they need to read the text of the Bible through the eyes of sceptical or enquiring friends. What difficulties does this passage present? What objections are provoked?

We should not even take for granted that anyone is interested in the passage. Why must I care about an ancient text? Charles Spurgeon addressed this issue of relevance. He noted that not every field of speech meets with a lack of interest: ‘I have heard of some very strange things, but I never did hear of a person going to sleep while a will was being read in which he expected a legacy, neither have I heard of a person going to sleep while the judge was summing up, and his life was hanging in jeopardy.’ Comedians and scientists can hold the attention of their hearers for an hour-long monologue. Why not preachers?

I am convinced that apologetics provides a key to making a sermon that can be charged with relevance. Paying attention to objections and evidence ensures that we see the passage through the eyes of sceptical hearers. We address unspoken concerns and public controversies. Our very starting point may be the pressing complaint or anxiety that the thoughtful non-Christian has uppermost in their mind.

### PROVIDE THE EVIDENCE

In his classic work on the subject, Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, ‘What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason!’ It is hard to teach fire. There is a Holy Spirit empowerment that engages both preacher and hearer. The fire is not a professional skill, anyone ‘who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit’, Lloyd-Jones warned. But the logic can be taught. We need to think carefully about the structure of our sermon and the way we make our case. Lloyd-Jones clearly did.

Preachers can be very good at giving the ‘what’ of scripture. We can tell it like it is. But we also need to give the ‘why’. Why does scripture say this? Why does God demand this? Why should we be confident in God’s word in the face of objections?

I would provide a caveat here. The courtroom origins of the word ‘apologetics’ and the emphasis on reason and evidence can be misleading. They may suggest sermons ought to take the form of a lawyer’s brief. While this may sometimes be appropriate, there are many ways of presenting evidence and making a case that are not remotely lawyer-like. What else is a testimony? To give our testimony is to present the reasons for our faith and they may well be rich in narrative and personal feeling.

### CONTEMPORARY CULTURE HAS LED TO THE FRAGMENTATION OF WORLDVIEWS AND A LOSS OF ANY SHARED PERSPECTIVE. PREACHERS NEED TO GRASP THIS POINT.

**“**
A great sermon may not so much provide the evidence as provide the context in which the hearer can discover the evidence. This struck me in Thomas Long’s thoughtful criticism of traditional preaching. Long noticed the disjunction that can exist between the excitement a preacher finds in their studies and the dullness of the final delivery. On one side of the bridge the preacher has an exciting, freewheeling experience of discovering the text, but the preacher has been trained to leave the exegetical sleuthing in the study, to filter out the zest of that discovery, and to carry only processed propositions across to the other side. The joy of “Eureka!” becomes, in the sermon, the dull thud of “My thesis for this morning is…”

**APOLOGETICS PROVIDES A KEY TO MAKING A SERMON THAT CAN BE CHARGED WITH RELEVANCE.**

You may provide evidence through the sharing your own journey of discovery. How were you troubled by an experience of unexpected suffering? What conversations or experiences did you have that helped you begin to make sense of the enigma of evil? Take your congregation on the journey of discovery to the places where the evidence is found. Make them feel the excitement of being Sherlock Holmes for a Sunday morning and leading their own investigation. They hear your reasons but they make their own discovery.

Even in telling a story we are presenting an argument. Does it make sense? Is it persuasive? The famous anecdote of the preacher’s notes that had the annotation, ‘Argument here weak – shout louder!’ sounds disturbingly plausible. This brings me to the important matter of how we illustrate our theme.

**TRUTHFUL ILLUSTRATIONS**

Illustrations can serve many purposes in a sermon. We use them to relax our congregation, to explain a difficult point, to offer a mental break, or to engage the emotions. The apologetic value of illustrations is enormous. We may use them to provide evidence. I am very happy using multimedia resources and will pepper a sermon with pictures of archaeological finds or scientific discoveries when appropriate to the text. Testimonies from relevant experts can give substance to our claims.

However, the evangelical world is awash with urban legends and distorted evidence. Too many DVDs and books continue to circulate hoaxes and frauds to the unwary. Google the evidence for Noah’s Ark, the Red Sea crossing or Charles Darwin’s conversion and you will quickly see what I mean. We need to be painstaking in our evaluation of relevant evidence. If we tell a story or anecdote is it really true? Repetition does not make something so. Check quotations first hand as well (the internet can help as well as harm here!). Do not rely on self-published websites to give accurate statistics.

Most of the time repeating an urban legend or fallacious argument will do little harm. If our congregation already believe then nothing much is at stake. But what about the one enquiring member of our congregation who went away and checked the facts? What if they discovered that an illustration we had used was, at best, greatly exaggerated or, at worst, a complete fabrication? Might it not serve to undermine their confidence in anything else we have said? Far worse, could it not undermine confidence in God’s own word too?

**DEMONSTRATE THE APPEAL**

Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher, described apologetics in these terms, “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things … It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason.” Pascal is misunderstood when this quote is taken to imply that reasons do not matter. His words rightly remind us that a convincing argument must not be less than rational but it should certainly be more than rational. The preacher works hard to ensure carefully chosen words capture the imagination and awaken spiritual interest. Logic matters, but the mysterious human person is more than just a walking brain. Hence, Pascal pointed out the complex role of emotion and experience in awakening an interest in religion: ‘we must make it loveable to make good men hope it were true, finally we must prove it is true.”

Apologetics requires our listening to culture. We need to listen to the alternative worldviews and instinctive objections that surround us. Francis Schaeffer, one of the great apologists of the twentieth century, described the virtue of listening. ‘If I have only an hour with someone, I will spend the first 55 minutes asking questions and finding out what is troubling their heart and mind, and then in the last five minutes I will share something of the truth.’ This is not bad advice for a preacher too. We need to listen to culture, understand the alternatives and then engage with them. The Biblical text itself will ask questions and provoke problems. If we can hear those questions and understand the appeal of non-Christian beliefs then we will be much better placed to make our case. In his recent book *Preaching*, Tim Keller displays just this confidence, ‘Only in Christ can
THE JOY OF “EUREKA” BECOMES, IN THE SERMON, THE DULL THUD OF “MY THESIS FOR THIS MORNING IS…”

any cultural plotline have a happy ending; he alone supplies the final “but yes” that consummates the biblical text and reaches people deep in their hearts.” The preacher has nothing to fear from contemporary culture. We need to listen and learn from culture as we make the case for the faith.

In his usual crude style, Richard Dawkins dismisses public faith in these words: “The nineteenth century is the last time when it was possible for an educated person to admit to believing in miracles like the virgin birth without embarrassment.”

Preachers need a robust response. Why not imagine your polite Sunday morning congregation were a lunchtime gathering of secular colleagues in the workplace and make your case accordingly? May they hear logic on fire!

2. Spurgeon, C, Lectures to my Students, pages 138–139.
6. I recommend using snopes.com to provide some background information to stories that circulate on the internet. If dramatic claims about archaeological discoveries are nowhere to be found in mainstream sites like biblicalarchaeology.org then I would tread very carefully.

Rev Dr Chris Sinkinson

Rev Dr Chris Sinkinson has been involved in Christian ministry with UCCF and in a local church pastoral leadership. Having been pastor of Alderholt Chapel for twelve years he is now the DL Moody lecturer in evangelism and apologetics at Moorlands College in Dorset. He has written a textbook on apologetics, Confident Christianity, published by IVP, and will also be speaking at Spring Harvest in Minehead in 2016.
Stand and deliver

SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

INTERACTIVITY

by Jo Swinney
The sermon has traditionally been delivered in the form of a monologue, and in the past, churchgoers have been ready and willing to sit quietly and listen. The societies in which Christianity flourished operated within a hierarchical structure in which there were individuals who had the authority to speak. The idea of receiving teaching on the Bible from someone at the front would have been perfectly acceptable.

But there has been a shift, both within culture at large and within the church. We are no longer so willing to be spoken at; we want to be part of a conversation. This is evidenced in classrooms, where school children are encouraged to explore, question and discover information for themselves. It is seen in the healthcare system, where we now ‘take control’ of our treatment and make our own choices. It is seen in politics, where our leaders must listen to the people and respond or be summarily expelled from power. As Richard Bauckham writes, ‘we seem to have reached a point in Western cultural history at which for many people, authority is indistinguishable from authoritarianism.’

Does this mean the monologue-style sermon is unfit for purpose? Must we let go of the idea that any one person is any more qualified than any other to speak on the Bible? I would argue an emphatic no to both those questions, with the qualification that preaching in a contemporary Western context is always going to be more effective if it involves some level of participation. And this is not exclusively true for contemporary Westerners. Jesus, the master communicator, taught interactively. Luke 9:11 says that Jesus ‘spoke to them about the kingdom of God’. The Greek word for spoke is *lalein*, which implies conversation, interaction and respect for the opinions of others. The goal of preaching, after all, is not to impart information but to draw people deeper into a transformational relationship with God.

When you preach, do you listen as well as speak? To what degree do your listeners determine what you say? In what ways, if any, do you give space for anyone other than you to speak?

REAL-TIME INTERACTION

Leonard Sweet is a firm believer in the participatory sermon. He writes, ‘a live-action sermon is filled with participatory discourse: conversation, dialogue, interaction, fill-in-the-blanks, talk-back, callback – and sometimes silence. The ball cannot be passed when someone is always bouncing it. If you never stop talking, your congregants won’t be a part of what you are trying to share.’

THERE HAS BEEN A SHIFT, BOTH WITHIN CULTURE AT LARGE AND WITHIN THE CHURCH. WE ARE NO LONGER SO WILLING TO BE SPOKEN AT; WE WANT TO BE PART OF A CONVERSATION.
Opportunities for people to contribute can be varied. It might be that you ask people to discuss something with those around them for a minute. You might say at the start of your talk that you are happy to be interrupted with questions or thoughts (if you are). If your church has a large contingent of younger tech-savvy people, you could have a live Twitter stream to which you refer occasionally. You could leave time for a question and answer session at the end of your presentation. You could bring people to the front to discuss certain points with you. Of course there are risks involved in this approach; someone might jump in and say something inappropriate, or start talking and keep going, or derail your direction and head off on an unhelpful tangent. It is quite a skill to respectfully curate a multi-person conversation, while keeping a hold of the reins. For this reason, you might be more comfortable exploring less immediate ways of encouraging participation.

Of course there are risks involved in this approach; someone might jump in and say something inappropriate, or start talking and keep going, or derail your direction and head off on an unhelpful tangent. It is quite a skill to respectfully curate a multi-person conversation, while keeping a hold of the reins. For this reason, you might be more comfortable exploring less immediate ways of encouraging participation.

**REACTIVE CONTENT**

There are many ways to make your preaching interactive, and not all of them involve vocal interruptions. John Stott argued that ‘true preaching is always dialogical’. But he did not mean a verbal dialogue, which he believed better suited to a Bible-study setting. Rather, he went on to say, ‘It refers to the silent dialogue which should be developing between the preacher and the hearers. For what he [the preacher] says provokes questions in their minds which he then proceeds to answer.’ What questions do you raise as you preach? Do you make them explicit or do you just let your listeners infer them by the answers you give? Asking questions gives people a chance to chew things over for themselves as they listen, giving them a chance to engage in what you are saying at a personal level.

Another way to make your preaching interactive without turning it into a discussion is to consciously craft your material in response to conversations you’ve had with your church members, what you know of their lives and contexts, the aspects of faith and doctrine you know they struggle to grasp or accept. When planning a sermon series, do you ever ask people what they’d like to be taught on? Do you seek feedback on your preaching, and take on board the comments you receive? Your sermons are less likely to be received as a one-way lecture if you allow your community to shape what you teach.

You might also want to create other opportunities for people to discuss the sermon. This could be in a small group that meets during the week, or directly after the service over coffee, or in an online forum like Facebook, where you could post a reminder of your key points and encourage chat.

**THE BABY AND THE BATHWATER**

The danger of interactive preaching is that content is diluted and becomes a palatable soup made of all the various opinions and perspectives of those present rather than the life-giving nutrition of God’s word as spoken through Scripture. The danger of a straight monologue is that it can soar over the heads of everyone in the room, touching no one. John Sweetman, in a blog post entitled “Talking back: is there a place for interactive preaching?” gives a definition that avoids both dangers: ‘Interactive preaching is authentic, biblical preaching when it involves a passage of Scripture, a sermon theme derived from the Scripture, a preaching intention, and a cohesive structure. The additional dimension of an interactive sermon is a genuine, spoken interaction with the audience that contributes to the preaching idea and the intention of the sermon.’

Sounds good to me.

**PREACHING IN A CONTEMPORARY WESTERN CONTEXT IS ALWAYS GOING TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE IF IT INVOLVES SOME LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION.**

THE DIGITAL MISSION FIELD

by Bex Lewis
So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.\footnote{So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.}\footnote{So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.} Seeking to reach the unreached is a fundamental aspect of our faith, but what does it look like in regards to preaching and the unreached in a digital age? Let us consider our definition of preaching. The most obvious is that of delivering a sermon to a group of people, especially within a church, but Google also defines it as to ‘publicly proclaim or teach a religious message or belief.’\footnote{So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.} For many in contemporary culture, churchgoing is not even considered as a possible activity, so where are people going to hear the gospel message?
Although a ‘daily act of worship’ of ‘a broadly Christian character’ currently remains a legal requirement in schools, the rules are widely interpreted or ignored by many. There is a possibility that many are simply going through the motions, which doesn’t sit well in a digital age. People want to be shown, not told, and when conviction is lacking, there is nothing to show.

Matthew 5:13–16 calls us to be salt and light in the world, and for thousands in the ‘digital age’, that world includes social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest. The digital is a part of our everyday lives, and there are enormous opportunities available for those who have learnt how to be critical, constructive, and confident inhabitants of the digital environment. Within the UK, 83 per cent of adults are now online, among 16- to 34-year-olds that increases to 98 per cent, whilst those aged 65+ are the fastest-growing segment of users, especially via mobile devices.

It’s important to think about how we engage within online social spaces both organisationally and through those in our congregations who live aspects of their lives online. Often, when people speak about the digital, they talk about it as a ‘virtual’ space. It is more helpful to think in terms of online and offline, rather than ‘virtual’ and ‘real’. Online life is part of ‘real’ life, and life is not risk-free. We need to judge it on its own merits, rather than measuring it against other forms of communication:

“EVEN THOUGH IN PRACTICE, FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION CAN, OF COURSE, BE ANGRY, NEGLECTED, RESISTANT, DECEITFUL AND INFLEXIBLE, SOMEHOW IT REMAINS THE IDEAL AGAINST WHICH MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IS JUDGED AS FLAWED.”

In a digital age, online relationships form part of the spectrum of contemporary friendships. Definitions of friendship can be quite loose, but trust and respect for others are of core importance, and vulnerability and humour are appreciated. Proclamation of the gospel, however, unless part of one’s own story, is not. Preachers can think of how, within a traditional sermon, they can provide information in a style that encourages sharing of short segments, highly shareable visual prompts, and opportunities for interaction, especially within a context where the congregation can share alongside aspects of their own personal story.

KNOWING THE CONTEXT

Just because we live in a digital age doesn’t mean that everything is digital, but communication needs to work within a culture that has been changed by the digital. People’s expectations have changed to focus upon shorter, more personalised, visual messages, in which listening and interactivity are crucial, and in which messages that pull people in by demonstrating relevance, rather than pushing out through repetition are key. As Romans 12:1–2 says, while we need to take our everyday lives (including the digital elements) and place them before God, we shouldn’t ‘become so well adjusted’ that we fit in without thinking.

Awareness and understanding of that culture, however, allows us to understand what may be effective, whether digital or offline! The Big Bible Project emerged from this kind of thinking: encouraging both biblical and digital literacy, enabling Christians to be good witnesses within the digital spaces, including a presence in darker spaces such as pro-suicide forums.

I recollect that while undertaking my PhD, Winchester hosted the evangelistic Walk of 1000 Men. Among my age group, we realised that all of our friends and activities were connected with church, and therefore it was not natural to invite anyone outside of church to such activities.
One of the things that social media allows is ongoing relationships regardless of geography: as part of their whole lives people can naturally share aspects of their faith. A friend noted that her child asked a friend to come to church with her after playing several X-Box games online, but that she didn’t play games in order to offer that invite! As Rev Robb Sutherland says, ‘when it is a case of looking to create opportunities it is a wasted effort as it negates relationship’, and he also reminds us, ‘Make friends because you like having friends. Live faithfully. Answer any questions you may get asked with integrity.’ As Jay Blake contributed on Facebook – Jesus was someone that people wanted to be around – are we?

**HOW TO REACH THE UNREACHED**

The digital has added some interesting new layers to some historic forms of seeking to reach the unreached. Speaker’s Corner has existed in Hyde Park, London since 1872, and was described by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014 as a cornerstone of ‘free speech’. It does, however, tend to attract those with more extreme views, and campaigners note that changes to the space have changed the atmosphere, with noise from nearby events leeching into the area.

With everyone with a mobile phone, it is now possible for every speech and preach to be recorded, and shared around the world. What will tend to attract attention, and be shared widely online will often focus upon someone who appears ‘deluded’ and can therefore be laughed at. More positive messages that chime with wider culture, such as calls for social justice and ecological stewardship are far more likely to attract positive attention and sharing.

If we’re talking about being where people are, then the secular press is important. In 2012 Archbishop Sentamu wrote a column for *The Sun*, seeking to reach a wider audience. In the face of criticism, his spokesman said: ‘With all the articles he writes, his intent is to get the gospel message to them, to reach out to people who aren’t necessarily in the Church.’ Similarly *Preach* columnist Rev Kate Bottley’s appearances on *Googlebox* allow a wide audience to see the life of a vicar – giving her an opportunity to speak more directly about issues – such as the use of humour in sermons!
PREACHERS CAN THINK OF HOW, WITHIN A TRADITIONAL SERMON, THEY CAN PROVIDE INFORMATION IN A STYLE THAT ENCOURAGES SHARING OF SHORT SEGMENTS, HIGHLY SHAREABLE VISUAL PROMPTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION.

how important it is that the Christian voice is someone who is ordained! Often street preachers, described by one of my friends as ‘shouting at the pigeons’ can have questionable theology: Those contributing to BBC’s Thought for the Day can come from a range of backgrounds – producers ask that you be yourself, tell your story and include God naturally in that story, rather than as a ‘surprise’ push message at the end.

EARNING THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD

Going even further, there are increasing efforts to re-engage on a community level, such as through food banks. Organisations like The Message Trust in Manchester,14 and the Awaken Movement in London15 ask people to move into an area seeking to ‘be the church outside the church walls’, as Rob Peabody, founder of Awaken describes it in their new group-conversation resource Intersect. Organisations such as Street Angels, Street Pastors and Streetlights not only offer practical help to those out late at night, but opportunities for conversation, and apparently, opportunities for selfies with some of those helped! Healing on the Streets is a more overtly Christian outfit, which offers healing as a gift of service, whilst at the Winchester Christmas Market I noted that Churches Together had an Instagram board with #winchesterwaits, as they asked what you were waiting for – a useful, and invitational, conversation starter.

Overtly evangelistic activities are undertaken by organisations such as Operation Mobilisation, including their floating mission ships. Universities undertake frequent missions through organisations such as UCCF and the Student Christian Movement. Fusion will give out toilet rolls or beans rather than tracts at Fresher’s Fair. Rev Sally Hitchener, chaplain at Brunel University hosts ‘Agnostics Anonymous’ and space for other non-judgemental conversations. Within workplaces, others seek to reach out through organisations such as Transform Work16 and Ministry2Business,17 and the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity,18 which encourages us all to recognise that we have a frontier of faith, whether we work or not. Hayley Matthews, formerly chaplain of Media City, indicated that social media tools gave her lots of opportunity to offer pastoral care for stressed workers, many of no particular faith.

There are so many opportunities for ‘preaching’ through simply living our everyday lives. When I put out a plea for suggestions on Facebook, they poured in: sharing Bibles on SD cards to countries where owning a Bible is dangerous, pub church, Messy Church, adventure centres, involvement in social justice campaigns, Twitter campaigns, social media surgeries, and yarn-bombing. The joy of digital is that it’s easy to connect with someone who has already done this, and be able to do it yourself. As Rev Pam Smith, author of Online Mission, says, there’s no ‘one size fits all’, and social media offers a particularly flexible space within which to engage.

1. bit.ly/BibleHubMatt28
2. bit.ly/PreachDefinition
3. bit.ly/AssembliesAdvice
4. bit.ly/BexLBBCLen
5. bit.ly/MediaUse
7. bit.ly/BRom12
8. bigbible.org.uk
9. bit.ly/Walk1000
10. speakerscorner.net
11. bit.ly/SpeakCnr
12. bit.ly/Sentamu
13. bit.ly/Bottley
14. message.org.uk
15. awakeningmovement.com
16. transformworkuk.org
17. ministry2business.co.uk
18. licc.org.uk
Preaching for a decision

by Charlie Cleverly

TO LISTEN TO A SERMON IS NOT MERELY A MATTER OF BEING ENLIGHTENED A LITTLE ABOUT GOD AND MAN, BUT PULLED INTO A CONFLICT WHERE STEEL CLASHES WITH STEEL. GOD’S TRUTH WISHES TO BE VICTORIOUS, AND THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES AND THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD MUST OUT. IN EVERY SERMON THAT IS A REAL SERMON THERE IS SOME CASTING OUT OF DEMONS.¹ Karl Barth
I believe that in every real sermon there is also preaching for a decision.

PREACHING FOR CONVERSION

The capacity of a preacher to preach for the decision to be converted is so needed today and yet relatively rare. Of course we do not ‘decide for Christ’: He decides about us. But we are called to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, and the preacher is called to help that decision.

My own experience – years ago now – happened like this: I had been reading the New Testament because my girlfriend had come to faith. She suggested I go to church to see what happened there. I happened to go to St Aldate’s Church in Oxford on Student Sunday. The preacher spoke on ‘Jesus – the same yesterday, today and forever’. Just as Jesus called people to make a decision to follow him 2000 years ago, so he was calling people today. The preacher invited any wanting to make that choice to say a prayer with him and then stay after the service so that he could explain what to do next.

Listening to this at the back of the room, I was in trouble. I knew I wanted this, but the trouble was that it felt as if it was coming too soon and it was too embarrassing and just too challenging. My heart was beating fast and I knew I had to go through with it. It was awful. But in the end it was also full of awe. The next day everything had changed: black and white or grey existence turned to colour. Meaning came; birth had come: I was alive for the first time.

At nearly every service now in this same church in Oxford, we invite people to make a decision to follow Christ. I believe we owe it to people today not to ‘beg the question’ of conversion. A description of what it means to be born anew, what to expect, testimony as to people’s experience of this will all help. But in the end there will be that awful, awe-ful moment of choice. It is awe-ful because there is awe involved. It is awful because people are seldom ‘ready’. The invitation always seems to come too soon for comfort. And it is risky for the preacher. This is because we are dealing with birth. If what is happening is like a birth it may come in a rush, it may be painful, unexpected, there may be complications.
I remember having the privilege of being in a small seminar once with Billy Graham in which he explained that the few minutes of ‘invitation’ was ten times more draining in terms of emotional and spiritual cost than all the previous thirty minutes of preaching.
**THE DECISION BEFORE THE DECISION**

The mechanics of inviting people to make a decision are not nearly as important as the decision of the preacher to dare to call people in the first place. This requires courage. It begins in the presence of God with the preacher’s call from God. Isaiah was called, and said, ‘Here I am, send me’. He was then told that people would be ever hearing but not understanding: it was to be a costly call. Jeremiah was to have a forehead harder than flint. He was told: ‘Fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks’. This is good advice to the one who preaches for a decision as the congregation’s ‘look’ may indeed dismay her or him at times. I remember having the privilege of being in a small seminar once with Billy Graham in which he explained that the few minutes of ‘invitation’ was ten times more draining in terms of emotional and spiritual cost than all the previous thirty minutes of preaching, and it left him completely depleted.

To invite people to make a decision we need to know that we have the word of the Lord. We need to have heard him and be a man or woman with a message that is burning in our hearts. We need the love of God to be constraining us. We need compassion for people and the conviction that to take a decision will really help them. Rather like a fireman calling people to leave a house that may burn down we need authority. Rather like a platoon leader asking people to enlist and make a decision to join up, we need to be practical and explain what is involved.

**THE PREACHER PREPARING THE PEOPLE**

It helps to let people listening know at the start of the talk that you will be calling for a decision, and how that will be presented. If they will be asked to come forward or to raise a hand or to pray a prayer or to meet a ministry team member, it will help people to know at some point early in the message that that is where you are headed. Then do what you have said you will do and see what happens. There is no escaping the preacher’s need to lean on God and to expect God to be at work. It is said that a preacher once asked CH Spurgeon for help because not many people were coming to Christ in his preaching. Spurgeon asked: ‘But you don’t expect people to come to Christ every time you preach, do you?’ ‘Well, I guess no’, came the reply. ‘There you are then’, said Spurgeon ‘that is exactly the reason you see little fruit: you have little expectation’.

**THE PREACHER’S SURRENDER**

Preaching for a decision involves the preacher’s surrender: his or her life of prayer and life with God is exposed as the decision is called for. EM Bounds describes the reason for much fruitless preaching: ‘The great hindrance is the preacher himself. There may be no discount on their orthodoxy, honesty, cleanliness, or earnestness; but somehow the man, the inner man, in the secret places has never broken down and surrendered to God, his inner life is not a great highway for the transmission of God’s message, God’s power. His inner being has never felt its thorough spiritual bankruptcy, its utter powerlessness. He has never learnt to cry out with despair and self-helplessness until God’s power and God’s fire comes in and fills, purifies, empowers.’

**PREACHING FOR OTHER DECISIONS**

Surrender is needed when it comes to preaching and calling people forward for other radical decisions. The Bible is a record of the choice to follow God being followed by several decisions to stick at it despite difficulty. We can think of God’s word to Abraham: he was called to move his whole family and leave his comfort zone and follow God’s call. Later, he is called to move his flocks to the oaks of Mamre; he is called to ‘consider the stars’ and then ‘believe God’ concerning his descendants. Sometimes these decisions were excruciatingly difficult, such as when he was called to decide to be willing to sacrifice his only son.

It is not simply God who calls to a succession of decisions: preachers in the Bible also call for successive decisions. John the Baptist did not only preach for repentance leading to baptism, he also was preaching for people to decide to change lifestyle, be content with wages, and behave differently.

Jesus called to his disciples to decide to leave their nets (or their tax office or their life of sin) and follow him. But this was not the end. After this, he called for the decision to change their thinking and actions in many lifestyle choices – whether it was over anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, love for enemies, giving, prayer, fasting, worry, or money. He called for many decisions to be made. At the end he was still calling Peter to make the decision to follow him, to love him, to feed his flocks and tend his sheep.

We are on the right track if we preach for different decisions. The decision is always a decision to follow Christ. But I believe this is not a once for all choice, but is a lifetime of decisions that invade many different areas of our lives.
There may be a decision to ask to be born again, to give up our lives completely in consecration, to be willing if necessary to die for our faith, a decision humbly to ask for the fullness/baptism/drenching/gifts of the Holy Spirit, a decision to ask for the power of the Spirit to be a witness, to devote our lives to prayer, to repent of impurity and embrace holiness of life, and so on....

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF RESPONSE

In our church in Oxford, most services have three elements: worship and seeking God in prayer; preaching and hearing his word; and then response and ministry. Clearly the response can occur during the preaching and is not dependent on making a decision to receive prayer at the end. Deep things can and should happen in a congregation as a preacher preaches. But for many, and on many occasions, it will help to be able to respond by asking for prayer.

We have a trained team who are equipped and expecting to pray for a crowd of people who respond. This ‘ministry time’ is an important part of each gathering of our community. It is where ‘body ministry’ can occur. It is where some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be exercised. It is a place of participation that lifts gatherings out of consumerism into community.

If a congregation is not used to responding and asking for prayer, to introduce a culture of response may take time and careful preparation, and will be costly to the one introducing change. As always, ‘for lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisors’ (Proverbs 11:14). It will help to gain agreement with elders and leaders that this is the way forward. I have found it important to explain why you are calling people. I have found it good to let people know in advance that the invitation will be coming and how, in physical terms, people can respond. Extraordinary fruit can come of these times of decision as you say to people, in the words of Joshua: ‘choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve’ (Joshua 24:15). It is as if the fact of deciding establishes things that can then be built on and people are strengthened to press on to follow God in their lives.

1. Barth, K and Eduard Thurneysen, E (translated 1935 by Richards, GW, Homrighausen, EG, and Ernst, KJ), God’s Search for Man, New York: Round Table Press.

Rev Charlie Cleverly

Rev Charlie Cleverly led a French-speaking Church in Paris before becoming Rector of St Aldate’s, Oxford in 2002. He is a member of the New Wine network. With his wife, Anita, he leads ASK, a network promoting prayer in Europe. He is the author of several books, most recently The Song of Songs – Exploring the Divine Romance (Hodder & Stoughton).
COLUMNSIST ➔ KATE BOTTLEY

Picking where to pitch it

Back in July I did what many preachers have to do, and made the round of leavers’ services and speech days. Being an education chaplain, former teacher, and ‘that vicar off the telly’, I get invited to speak at more than my fair share of leavers’ services. So I found myself invited to our local independent school to impart some wisdom to those departing for educational pastures new.

Now despite going to a state comprehensive, my secondary school had delusions of grandeur and so as a former head girl (don’t laugh) I was pretty confident I would know how this speech day lark worked. The head teacher called me in before the ‘gig’ to explain the running order and to helpfully suggest what I might like to focus on in my talk. The speech day is a chapel event so as well as kids, parents, and governors, there would be local dignities and representatives from the academy group the school belongs to, although one did not join us because of his objection to an ordained woman being asked to speak. "sigh"

I prepared the talk, a few visual aids, a story and a fairly robust biblical point, but I just didn’t know where to aim it. I knew that the kids had seen me in assembly before and knew what to expect, so it was the grown-ups I was worried about. There would be parents expecting a certain standard, and experienced staff who knew how to spot a good talk when they saw one. I also suspected there would be a fair few in the congregation wondering what on earth I was doing there in the first place when last year they had had one of the Deans from the cathedral. It wasn’t the kids that scared me, it was the adults!

I once knew a head teacher who did a cracking assembly. Put her in front of a hall full of children and she was brilliant, funny, and entertaining but without holding back on the thought-provoking challenge. However put that same head in a room full of grown-ups and she went to pieces. She just couldn’t talk to adults. I was starting to understand how she felt.

So what to do? As I saw those eager faces coming up to collect their hockey prizes and music certificates I thought it through. Who was I being asked to be there for? Of course the parents, staff and governors had expectations, and inspiring them would be good, but if I was forced to choose I decided it would be the children I’d rather get to. So that’s where I pitched it: not dumbed down but just not trying too hard to put on a show for the grown-ups. Besides, I was pretty convinced I could fool the mums and dads, but a twelve-year-old can spot a fake a mile away. Sometimes you have to be precise in where to pitch your preach rather than hoping to hit as many as possible. I was going to aim it at the children and hope the parents might get something out of it too.

‘That was different!’ said one mum over Pimms on the headmaster’s terrace afterwards. ‘Oh really? What do you usually get?’, I asked. ‘Well we’ve never laughed during the sermon at speech day before, and I can’t remember there ever being custard pies!’

I don’t think they are going ask me back every year but I do hope this sermon might be one that not only the kids remember but the grown-ups too.

Kate Bottley

Kate Bottley is an Anglican priest, wife and mother, who stars in Channel 4’s Gogglebox. She gained a national profile when a YouTube video of her leading a flash mob at the end of a wedding ceremony went viral in 2013, and has since done a wonderful job of dismantling stereotypes about Church of England clergy.
Preaching to the unconverted

THE PROS AND CONS OF THE ‘SEEKER-FRIENDLY’ SERVICE

by Sarah Lothian
Type the words ‘seeker-sensitive’ into any search engine and you could be forgiven for thinking that tailoring services to attract newcomers is an affront to the Christian faith.

The words mean simply being consciously open to people outside church but somehow over the years they have developed negative connotations. There seem to be two main objections and the top search engine results reflect these:

“WHY I LEFT YOUR SEEKER-FRIENDLY CHURCH ... NOT SURE YOU EVEN NOTICED... (seeker-friendly churches neglect more established believers)

I WILL NEVER STEP FOOT IN A SEEKER-FRIENDLY CHURCH ... THIS MODERN-DAY BAAL... (Heresy alert! The gospel is being watered down)
According to dictionaryofchristianese.com the terms ‘seeker-friendly’ and ‘seeker-sensitive’ emerged in the 1980s and 90s. This was around the time churches such as Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek Church in Chicago and Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church in California began experimenting with ways of drawing non-Christians into church by offering a brand new, contemporary kind of church experience.

The dictionary says: ‘The seeker-sensitive strategy has had its fair share of critics in the past 20 years, but even the critics have to admit that the changes introduced by seeker-sensitive churches brought a lot of new people into church…’

Should we alter services in order to reach people who may not have a Christian background? And if so – how?

One Anglican vicar has created an entirely new church in his home town using a drastically different model to what has become ‘traditional church’. The Reverend Paul Oxley’s community has met in various different venues in Milton Keynes; a cinema, a former nightclub now owned by a secular youth charity, and a bar. St Mark’s held its first public service three years ago at Christmas, and the focus from the start was on the seeker.

Rev’d Oxley was completing his curacy when he visited his mum at home one Christmas and saw plans to expand the city.

‘There were 20,000 new people being added on to the east and west side of the city and I remembered Rick Warren who said you go where there are large migrations of people… plus I knew not everyone was going to their local church in what could be described as the least churched city in the country. So I thought let’s try and start something that is different and is all for people who don’t go to church or who don’t want to.

‘I have this belief that most people believe in God. They’ve either got lost looking at the stars or they’ve held a newborn baby. Maybe they’ve been at a hospital bedside or they’ve been late for an interview or their auntie’s got cancer or something and at some point everyone’s gone – oh God could you help, or could you sort this out, or wow this baby is amazing. And however fleeting that moment most people are OK with there being a God. The stumbling block comes when they come to church and all of a sudden there’s a bunch of people who understand the language that no one else understands, they have a bunch of customs that no one else is a part of, they speak in a tone and in patterns which they don’t when they’re outside in the office or with their kids.’

The culture of ‘seeker-sensitive’ churches is important. Many have swapped traditional ways of leading services and opted instead for ways of doing church that don’t exclude people unversed in church custom.

At another St Mark’s, this time in Farnham, Surrey, attracting newcomers has meant a major change to service planning – the rotas have been ripped up! [see boxout].

Priest Rev’d Lesley Crawley says: ‘I think it is a very seeker-friendly church – in the sense that it’s all very obvious what is going on, there isn’t a gang of people who look at you if you’re doing anything wrong. Things go wrong every Sunday, people do seem to slot in and feel completely at home very quickly.’ At

IT’S NOT WEAK TEACHING, IT’S JUST REALLY SIMPLE TEACHING. I MEAN, THERE IS NOTHING COMPLICATED ABOUT THE GOSPEL. JESUS LOVES YOU, GO AND WORSHIP HIM AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR. THERE’S NO EXCUSE FOR LAZY TEACHING; YOU WANT TO GIVE PEOPLE MEAT AND I DON’T THINK A GOOD WAY TO ATTRACT A NEW SEEKER IS TO ALWAYS GIVE MILK.
St Mark’s in Farnham the style is very relaxed. Rev’d Crawley encourages the congregation to interact with her and they often discuss difficult Scripture together. ‘The sermon isn’t a monologue,’ she says. Again, this is typical of the ‘seeker-sensitive’ model which is laid-back and relationship focussed.

‘Everything we do has to be for the guest,’ says Rev’d Oxley. ‘That means our language and our practices, our venues and our locations. So we try and keep it fun, and we try and keep it as informal as possible. There’s always food, there’s always coffee, there’s always noise and interaction and conversation, whether you’ve just walked into the church for the first time having just considered God five minutes ago, your voice is valid and you get to say what you think even if it’s violently opposed to what I’ve just said from the front.

‘Look at the early church... Acts says they met in each other’s homes all the time with gladness and shared what they had, they gave to people as they had need they broke bread and ate together. If you were to write a description of most modern churches, though, it would read “The believers carried on ad hoc throughout the week, vaguely remembering church at some point. They met together occasionally for an hour a week where they shut up and listened to one person at the front talk on their views on a certain passage of scripture before there was ten minutes of fairly weak coffee. During this time you had to keep an eye on your kids that were running around while trying to look out for somebody new and remember the name of the person you met three weeks ago.” From the start we wanted to flip that on its head and spend a lot of time out and inject into the life of the church memory-makers and experiences, fun things, trips and mission opportunities.’

Perhaps one of the reasons this model of church has sparked such suspicion is because it challenges what, for many, is ‘the norm’. But the main charges remain. One criticism levelled at seeker-friendly churches is that they’re not good at discipleship. This is something that pioneer megachurch Willow Creek recognised and changed seven years ago after research suggested people wanted to go deeper in their knowledge of theology and scripture.
The second main criticism assumes that the gospel is being watered down or made more palatable to get people through the door. Rev’d Oxley believes both criticisms are based on misunderstandings. 'I think if Jesus was still teaching on the earth today he’d get slammed for his teaching. He did things like hold up a seed he’d borrowed from a farmer and said – hey look at this: the Kingdom of God is like this mustard seed – and then sat down and didn’t give any answers or explanation and he let the listeners do the legwork.

'It's not weak teaching, it's just really simple teaching. I mean, there is nothing complicated about the gospel. Jesus loves you, go and worship him and love your neighbour. There's no excuse for lazy teaching; you want to give people meat and I don't think a good way to attract a new seeker is to always give milk. I think it's possible to give meat – just in a language that anyone can understand – I don't think you have to do either/or. There still should be challenge if you've been a Christian for 60 years. I think it was Rob Bell who said you don't just jump from A to F, you jump from A to B to C. The goal is always to move people on and we all learn from each other.'

In Farnham Rev’d Crawley says people still accept the traditional gospel – there is no need to make it 'more' attractive than it already is. 'I personally think the gospel is good enough without me having to stress about the difficult bits,' she says. 'The person of Jesus that's presented in the gospels is a compelling person and the sense of community and a sense of love is a compelling thing and somehow people get drawn to God through those things.'
Book Reviews

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
OUTSTANDING

★ ★ ★ ★
GOOD

★ ★ ★
PERFECTLY OK BUT NOT VERY EXCITING

★ ★
LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO SPEND TIME ON THIS BOOK

★
SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN
The subtitle of this book is ‘Trusting Again in a Cynical World’, which really sets out its point. The world has become distrusting, often with good reason, even of the supposedly ‘good’ agencies, and Meynell seeks to show a foundation and model of trust.

This book is set out in three sections. The first deals with how we have seemingly become unable to trust the decision-makers, how spin doctors and manipulation of facts have left us not knowing what ‘truth’ we can trust.

The second section focuses on life after trust is lost. It deals also with the unreliability of the past, even as we remember it – we all have selective memories! We need to find a way to escape the wilderness of mirrors.

The third and longer section urges us to move from trusting no one to trusting The One, as he explores a Christian model for trust and reliable community. By definition, the church is made up of all comers; sometimes this is a struggle, but it can be its biggest strength. Jesus is helpfully put forward as a model for power.

I found the first two sections fascinating and thought provoking; the third less so, perhaps because it was less fresh as a concept to me. But that doesn’t mean it wasn’t useful. Meynell reminds us of the true power in the brokenness of us all and the forgivingness of God that should make community and trust possible.

This book would be useful for those wanting to explore where faith meets sociology, and answers to the cries of cynicism and who can we trust.

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This meticulously researched book is inspired by the need to critically review the theology, purpose and practice of preaching in relation to mission in the present day. Johnson’s starting point is Newbiggin’s work exploring what would be involved in ‘a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture’. Drawing widely upon other theological texts he explores the roles of both preacher and the Christian community in the work of mission.

This is a wide-ranging academic approach to missional homiletics. The author’s debate and discussion based on Barth, Newbiggin and other theologians is inspiring. However for those not familiar theological terms or concepts that section is quite difficult to follow and needs ready access to a dictionary. This is not the case in later sections and I have found that his wide ranging view of the work of the whole church to be both inspiring and refreshing.

This book will be a great asset primarily to those in full-time ministry and in teaching theology and the art of preaching. But it also has much to inspire and give new vision to all engaged in preaching or mission within the church. It might also form the basis of group study and discussion focussing upon the practical issues discussed in the chapters rather than the academic discussion.
REVIEWS

**JESUS ON TRIAL**
A LAWYER AFFIRMS THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL
David Limbaugh, Authentic Media (2015)

One could easily be forgiven for thinking that this is yet another book about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Don’t be fooled! To make assumptions about the book based on its title and the picture on the cover (a crown of thorns) would be an injustice. Its scope is much wider, in that David Limbaugh has set out, with a lawyer’s insight and training, to examine the truthfulness of the whole Bible.

He demonstrates that there is a mass of evidence to show that the Bible is historically reliable – more so than any other ancient text. There are about 25,000 New Testament manuscripts in at least seven languages, compared to a mere 1800 manuscripts (all in Greek) for Homer’s Iliad.

He examines the arguments of critics of Christianity and convincingly demonstrates the large degree of ideological prejudice and bias present in the critics’ views. He also shows how the Bible was instrumental in laying down the foundations of both theoretical and practical practices in modern science, from shipbuilding (Genesis 6/Lloyds Register of Shipping) to the Second Law of Thermodynamics (Isaiah 51:6, Psalm 102, Hebrews 1:11), from the origins of life (confounding the writings of Darwin and the ‘missing link’) to mathematics.

To a certain extent the book is a travelogue of the journey of David from sceptic to believer. It details his testimony in addition to critical evaluation of evidence to produce a reliable ‘First Steps to Theology’ textbook. It encourages the reader to reach their own conclusions about biblical evidence, as well as questioning their own understanding of the Bible. There is included in his conclusion a reminder of Pascal’s famous wager about betting on the existence of Christ and the truth of Christianity. This book goes a long way to shortening the odds of Pascal being right!

This is a well written and informative book which should form part of every preacher’s library.

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**EVANGELISTIC PREACHING**
Roger Carswell, 10 of Those (2015)

Seasoned evangelist Roger Carswell draws on his vast experience in order to present the biblical mandate to preach evangelistically to the non-Christian. This very short book (60 pages) offers five chapters outlining that the gospel must spell out clearly the message of Christ crucified; it should be done creatively and in love, seeking to connect with the non-Christian; and it should yield fruit.

The book offers a gentle rebuke to preachers who may have the tendency to leave the gospel hanging around the sidelines of sermons at evangelistic services or other events. Roger’s passion for proclaiming the gospel clearly and explicitly and with the expectation of a response from the listener was refreshing and I found myself nodding in agreement at the end of each chapter.

However, if you’re not currently an evangelistic preacher, or from a church tradition where this is a regular feature, I’m not convinced this book will make a convert out of you! It’s full of great biblical principles and useful quotes, and I certainly finished the book feeling I ought to do more evangelistic preaching, but the book made little attempt to equip me in terms of how to accomplish this. I wanted to hear more personal stories of changed lives – I wanted to be moved, not just informed.

It feels as if the author is writing to an older generation, brought up with modernism and primarily interested in listening to facts and knowledge of the historical Jesus, and perhaps more effort could have been made to address evangelistic preachers dealing with a postmodern context. This could have included the role that apologetics, parable, personal experience and testimony play for instance, in order to help the unbeliever start to ‘hear’ the gospel.

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ALAN RASHLEIGH

JOHN MONAGHAN
Do not read this book! Let me clarify: simply to read it is to miss the point of this wonderful handbook and instruction guide. It is not for reading, it’s for doing!

The old JOY acronym (‘Jesus first, others next, yourself last’) – has been drummed into many of us since childhood. The danger of this is working in your own strength and joy becoming dull duty. This book reminds us that joy springs from our own living relationship with God and that the desire to tell others about what you have found bubbles out of that excitement.

This very readable and well-laid-out book doesn’t advocate emotional evangelism. Michael makes it very clear that talking about Christ with non-believers is an everyday activity: not an optional extra, but an inescapable part of a faithful life. Many chapters use a format of lists with explanations, so for example ‘The cross revisited’ includes six ways that we might explain what Jesus’ death and resurrection was about.

The book starts with the story of Michael’s own discovery of Christ but also talks about the many different ways in which people might come to faith. It is realistic – chapter eight, ‘All change’, is a brilliant analysis of the society that Christians, seekers, doubters and atheists now live in – but still does not let us off the hook. Michael’s stance is that we are not the evangelists, God is, but he uses us in the process of awakening, call, challenge, decision and growth.

So what am I going to do with this book? As a preacher and church leader, I dare to suggest it should be compulsory reading for all in such positions, and I will be recommending it widely. It has challenged my attitudes, work, preaching and preparation for worship. Everyone needs a passion for evangelism though (chapter 5), and our fellowship group could follow the helpful nine-step programme on nurturing (chapter 13). Very highly recommended.

In *Recapturing the Voice of God*, Steven W Smith responds to a weakened form of expository preaching, one that relies on a standard structure and typical three-point approach to the weekly message. Instead, he supports ‘text-driven’ preaching, a methodology in which the structure, substance, and spirit of a biblical text will govern those same three facets of a sermon. Smith explains that ‘we are not after what the text says: we are after what the text means’, encouraging ‘re-animation’ and ‘re-presentation’ of gospel materials.

Smith achieves his goal, but he starts slowly. His introductory chapters should defend and explain the idea, but he spends too little time here. While it might have been abstract work for a practical book, a little more theorising and patient articulation of this approach would have been helpful. Smith also acknowledges but fails to properly address the obvious objection: doesn’t this tactic just replace one set of methodological restrictions with another? The answer seems to be ‘yes and no’, and Smith should be more convincing on the variety of possibilities his method allows.

Fortunately, once the book begins to explore the different broad genres, Smith excels. His model of exegesis is wonderful, both in general insight and in ability to mine the Bible specifically for sermon needs. He focuses on finding the main thrust of a chosen pericope, but also explores ways to limit or expand a selection. He provides strong examples for process and results on even difficult passages.

I would recommend this book for all preachers, particularly those unfamiliar with text-driven (or even expository) preaching and those who find themselves in a rut.
Here is a book for every thinking Christian willing to face up to the challenge of honest biblical interpretation, especially with regard to the many and varied views about God which it is possible, selectively, to cull from the pages of holy writ.

The author faces up to the issues posed by those passages which present a picture of a wrathful and jealous God and helps us to understand why they are there and how, historically, there were those in Israel who perceived their inadequacy and moved on to deeper concepts, helping us to see a distinction between the ‘real God’ and the God of the Bible. The peaks and troughs of Old Testament understandings of God are addressed in a rational way and are seen as leading on to the fuller revelation of God in Christ as discerned by the various New Testament writers, who all give their different perspectives.

So the book is essentially a search for the ‘real God’ to be found in the varied understandings of him/her as recorded in the different kinds of scriptures in both Testaments. The conclusion arrived at expresses the conviction that the ‘God’ of the Old and New Testament texts points to the ‘real God’, that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is, for Christians, definitive, and that Jesus is the key to the whole of the Bible. The ‘real God’ is a God of love with all the implications this involves for the world, the Church and the individual.

This book will be of help to preachers in their task of biblical interpretation and to lay people wishing to expand their biblical understanding. While it is not in any way a book that would claim to tackle philosophical issues such as theism, nevertheless these are dealt with in the appropriate context as the meanings of the scriptures are wrestled with. The book is to be warmly commended also to serious study groups. Questions for discussion are provided at the end of each chapter, as are references to other key books related to the subject. The author is a Methodist scholar of the highest reputation and the book deserves a wide circulation.

This book may be short in pages but it is very long in its wisdom and its practical advice to all Christians who want to know how to evangelise. On the surface it is a very easy read, but deceptively so – it contains profound truths that repay deep study. It is not without its challenges but each one is fully explored and advice offered as to how they can be overcome.

The subtitle is ‘How to talk about Jesus even when it’s tough’, and that’s exactly it. All of us as Christians and disciples who have taken up the cross to follow Jesus are beholden to witness for him. It is part of the Great Commission. But it is no easy task to do. In fact being a Christian is probably the hardest thing any of us can do if we are going to do it properly. Every day we are faced with challenges to which we have to respond – moral, ethical, philosophical, sociological, religious – and there is the often overwhelming feeling that our response falls short of the required mark. But at the very least we have to try to respond as Jesus would and also, at the very least, we have to be alive to any opportunity to witness for him.

Every Christian should read this book (and that’s praise indeed) from the ‘ordinary’ (whatever that is) person in the pew to the minister taking the service. It offers clear, practical guidelines, backed up by Scripture and leads the reader step by step into a position whereby he has the confidence and the tools to evangelise. The back of the book contains some very useful resources. However, it doesn’t pull its punches. It is honest that telling people about Jesus can be painful and harmful and can lead to all sorts of problems. But at the same time it’s a most wonderful, joyous thing to do that brings its own rewards that are everlasting.
Welcome to the first ever *Preach* Book Club! Each quarter, we’ll be introducing you to a new book to encourage and challenge you in your preaching ministry. You can expect a summary, a review or two, discussion questions written especially for the book club, an interview with the author, and an online forum to share your thoughts with others.

We suggest you get together with three or four other preachers, lay on the coffee and cake, and dive into some inspiring conversation.

**IGNITING THE HEART: PREACHING AND IMAGINATION**

Kate Bruce | SCM Press | published 30 September 2015

**SUMMARY**

It has been said that the day of the sermon is over. Kate Bruce argues that the day of the poorly conceived, ill-prepared, dull, disconnected, boring, irrelevant, authoritarian, yawn-inducing, patronising, pontificating, pointless and badly delivered sermon is indeed over. Imagination can help to engage the hearer in a sermon which seeks to evoke rather than to inform. Imagination frames how we see the world and ourselves in it. As such it has a vital role in shaping how preachers see the preaching task itself, which in turn affects how we go about the task. A theology of imagination is presented to demonstrate the central importance of imagination in the life of faith. Allied to this is an analysis of the sacramental nature of preaching and the role of imagination in enabling the ‘Aha, now I get it’ moment of sacramental ‘seeing as’. Connected to enabling new seeing, preaching in the lyrical voice is defined and discussed along with the importance of preachers shaping sermons for the ear.

**REVIEWS**

‘In this book Kate Bruce draws on her considerable experience as school teacher, parish priest, theological college tutor and stand-up comic. With an assured grasp of homiletic theory and a passion for creative sermon construction, she shows us how the imagination can disclose new worlds, turn our assumptions upside down, provoke us to ask ‘what if?’ and help us live in the minds of other people.’ – David Day

‘Kate Bruce... shows how the interaction of the imagination, with both the biblical text and contemporary culture, can transform the preaching event and allow God to work in exciting and relevant ways.’ – Revd Professor David Wilkinson, Principal, St John’s College, Durham

‘An exploration of the theology of imagination and language, examples from sermons, models of preaching and guidance for good practice are offered in a book which will appeal to a wide readership. I commend this book to all preachers who hope that, through their sermons, God will be encountered as the Spirit breathes life into their words and hearts are warmed.’ – Ruth Gee, Chair of Methodist Conference (2013–14)

I commend this book to all preachers who hope that, through their sermons, God will be encountered as the Spirit breathes life into their words and hearts are warmed.

*Preach* readers can buy the book for £12.99 (RRP £16.99) by using the voucher code IHKB15 at scmpress.co.uk

For the discussion questions, author interview and more, please visit preachweb.org/bookclub
Graeme Garden was born in 1935, a non-conformist by birth. His mother was a Congregationalist (pre-URC), and his father the son of a Baptist minister. With the outbreak of war in 1939 and the subsequent fuel restrictions, which ruled out excessive use of the family car, a decision was taken to transfer loyalties to the nearby Methodist church, a decision which proved, possibly, the most significant change in Graeme’s Christian journey having celebrated, this year, his sixty-first year as a Local Preacher.

William Cowper – the writer of several much loved hymns – is perhaps best known for writing ‘God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform’, a hymn that has for many years been high on my personal list of favourites. It is filled with challenging, inspiring and reassuring promises, culminating, in the sixth verse, with the words — ‘Blind unbelief is sure to err/and scan his work in vain/God is his own interpreter/and he will make it plain’.

We are constantly seeking reassurance and explanations. We strive to make sense of so many things with which we are regularly confronted and we have difficulty finding satisfactory answers to the many questions which, inevitably, fill our minds; but we have already acknowledged that ‘God is his own interpreters’ and we can take comfort from that and put our trust in him. Many of us will recall our Sunday School days when we sang, with great enthusiasm, ‘trust and obey/for there’s no other way/to be happy in Jesus/but to trust and obey’.

I guess I was about six years old when I first ‘took to the pulpit’. Every Sunday morning I would accompany my parents to church and I could hardly wait, on returning home, to take myself off into the lounge where I would clamber on to a stool at the back of an arm chair and ‘preach’ to my imaginary congregation. I suppose I could be said to be answering a ‘call to preach’ but I knew that, all too soon, I would have to abandon my ‘congregation’ and join the rest of the family for lunch, although not until after my father, himself a son of the manse, had invited me to say grace!

Many people have influenced me on my journey as a preacher, not least those who have taught me that I do not always, necessarily, know what is best for me. At one time I was convinced that my future would lead me into full-time ministry. At an initial interview, shortly after my completion of two years’ National Service, it was suggested to me that I would be wise to put the idea on hold until I had taken time to more fully consider the implications. I was young and impetuous and I had been thinking about little else for several years.

I was devastated. I felt rejected. But I remained convinced that God was calling me and I was haunted by those words of William Cowper: ‘God is his own interpreter...’ I threw myself into preaching whenever and wherever I was able. I had the privilege of serving the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust as National Advocate in 2013/14 and, for the past several years, have had the opportunity of travelling widely and offering myself in the service of him ‘whom to serve lies perfect freedom’ (to quote St Augustine).

One of my lasting memories is spending a few hours with a close friend, a minister, who aged just 38, was dying from cancer. We spoke about the future of our church and the hundreds of youngsters who attended it. His final words to me were, ‘Our task and privilege is to teach them and preach them into the Kingdom.’ What greater task could one be challenged to undertake?
The Late Greats
William Edwin Sangster

by Rev Dr Jonathan Hustler

WILLIAM EDWIN SANGSTER — TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Sangster born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Accepted for ministerial trailing after demobilisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Ordained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Superintendent Minister at Westminster Central Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>President of the Methodist Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>General Secretary of the Methodist Church Home Mission Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Last sermon. Retires with ill-health (muscular atrophy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Publication of Westminster Sermons and instructions that no others should be published posthumously. Sangster dies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In 1957 The British Weekly described WE Sangster as ‘the central voice of Methodism’. He was arguably the most renowned preacher in the denomination and its leading homiletician, whose books influenced generations of preachers in the late twentieth century and are still widely read.

Sangster entered ministerial training immediately after World War I and served in a number of circuits before beginning a sixteen-year ministry at Westminster Central Hall on the day Britain entered World War II. He was President of the Methodist Conference in 1950 and left Central Hall to head the Home Mission Division of the Church in 1955 until ill-health forced early retirement in 1958 a mere two years before his death.

That Sangster wrote so voluminously about preaching and (with some reluctance) published a two-part collection of the Westminster Sermons means that there is readily available material to assess his approach. However, that it still remains impossible to do justice to it. Sangster believed that the sermon was primarily an oral event, that the written text lacked the power of the sermon ‘to do one thing and to do it once’. With that caveat, three features can be identified as central to Sangster’s pulpit ministry.

The first was meticulous preparation. ‘No man [sic] can be a consistently effective preacher who begrudges the time which pulpit preparation takes’. For Sangster, preaching required industry and that industry needed to be closely related to the preaching event. He therefore counselled against using the same sermon twice and was utterly scathing about anyone who was pretentious enough to present another’s material as their own. This industry, moreover, cooperated with rather than excluded the power of the Holy Spirit; he could be caustic about those who believed that inspiration negated the need for hours of prayer and study. But it was not simply time that Sangster believed was essential to preparation. He was also an advocate of careful method which (rather than simply a discussion of the form of the sermon) is the theme of The Craft of Sermon Construction. His central question in his homiletical writing was always about what enabled effective preaching.

Key to that was the use of illustration. Significantly, The Craft of Sermon Illustration preceded its companion volume on Construction, though in Sangster’s thinking the illustrations were always subsidiary to the theme and purpose of the sermon. Appropriate illustrations, he maintained, enabled the sermon to do what the sermon was there to do. Whilst Sangster came close to arguing that illustration is essential to good preaching, it remained for him a secondary element, the purpose of which was to achieve clear communication of the gospel, so the published sermons are littered with such phrases as ‘Do you see my point?’ and ‘Do I make my distinction clear? Let me illustrate.’ ‘Illustration’ was a broad category for Sangster, embracing a wide range of devices, but unlike in some more recent approaches to homiletics, these did not carry the content of the sermon; rather, they were they to support (sometimes ‘to prove’) the argument that he was making.

That argument was almost invariably about Jesus Christ. The third inescapable feature of Sangster’s preaching is its Christocentricity. In the second volume of Westminster Sermons every title begins ‘He…’; even that for Trinity Sunday is ‘He shares society in the Godhead’. The centrality of Christ Jesus in his preaching was, of course, a reflection of the centrality of Christ Jesus in Sangster’s life. In ‘Four Judgments on Jesus’ Sangster invites his congregation to affirm that Jesus is ‘my Lord and my God’, a declaration that opens the believer to the transforming power of the Saviour, echoing the earlier approach in He is Able: “Testimony will have preference over opinion and the argument of fact will be given precedent over all other arguments. Jesus can do it. Jesus has done it. Jesus is doing it… Jesus did it. Jesus!”

Paul Sangster recorded that ‘of the hosts of people who heard him, few could explain why it was such a great experience’. Perhaps the answer (as William Edwin Sangster himself might have given it) was simple: they met with Christ.

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Rev Dr Jonathan Hustler

Jonathan Hustler is a Methodist presbyter who has served in three circuits and as vice principal of Wesley House, Cambridge. He teaches and writes on Church History, Preaching, and Pastoral Theology. He is now Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministries in the Connexional Team.

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5. For example, Sangster, WE (1958), Power in Preaching. London: Epworth, page 47.
Preaching problems: advice from our panel

THE SCENARIO

I recently became the vicar of three churches in a rural parish. I was clear throughout the interview process that I am an evangelical and that I believe biblical preaching to be central to my ministry. I have quickly come to understand that my congregations have no interest in hearing the gospel; in fact, several of the most established members have taken me aside and advised me to tone down what I say. One even suggested I stop ‘banging on about the Bible’ and give them some more ‘palatable’ sermons! I am hugely discouraged and wonder if I made a mistake in accepting the job.

RICHARD LITTLEDALE

You are clearly having a very testing time, although I wasn’t sure whether this was in all three churches or just one of them? I wonder whether they truly do have ‘no interest in hearing the gospel’, or whether they struggle to hear it in particular ways. Jesus was preaching in an era when the appetite for the formal teaching of the synagogue was on the wane, and yet he could still draw huge crowds to listen to his stories and teaching. Sometimes it is not that people don’t want to hear about this, but rather they don’t want to hear it like that. You may find that a change in the flavour of your sermon could help – preaching reflectively instead of analytically, or using narrative instead of argument. A change in vector may help too – preaching towards the Bible from the world rather than the other way round. If people leave church saying ‘fancy the Bible having something to say about that’ you may find that their enthusiasm to listen and yours to preach undergoes a revolution. Well preached, a ‘palatable’ sermon can have just as much biblical impact – a bit like Jeremiah’s sweet-tasting but hard-hitting scroll.

Richard Littledale

Richard Littledale is the minister of Teddington Baptist Church, and has always had a lively interest in innovative communication. He has written several books on preaching as well as two children’s stories. He is a radio broadcaster and runs a busy blog at richardlittledale.me.uk.

SOMETIMES IT IS NOT THAT PEOPLE DON’T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THIS, BUT RATHER THEY DON’T WANT TO HEAR IT LIKE THAT.
DAVID BRACEWELL

I want to say that I applaud your commitment to the centrality of preaching in your ministry, and your integrity in making that clear when you were interviewed. However, one or two things concern me. The first is the conclusion that resistance to your sermons means the congregation ‘have no interest in hearing the gospel’. That may not necessarily be the case. Linked to that is the advice you have received to tone down your preaching and to ‘stop banging on about the Bible’ which just makes me wonder if there is an issue here about the style of your preaching. You say that you have recently been appointed and that you have quickly realised that people do not want biblical preaching, and that raises another issue about time and trust.

THE BEST PREACHING ARISES OUT OF STEADY, LONG-TERM PASTORAL CARE FOR THE CONGREGATION IN THE CONTEXT OF WORSHIP, ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS AND CREATIVE LEADERSHIP.

MANDY BRIGGS

The church where everyone thinks like you and agrees with everything you say simply does not exist.

I celebrate our ‘broad church’ where there is room for many different theological viewpoints, but there is a problem when congregations become too comfortable and do not wish to be challenged in any way.

Have you explored what the members mean by ‘palatable sermons’? Homilies about holidays and gardening cover safe ground, but we’re called as preachers to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to challenge people to faith and action, not talk about our petunias.

You have been very clear about your theological position and your belief in biblical preaching, but is there a chance that you have come in with very fixed views about what you want to say and how you want to say it? Have you also taken time to listen to where the congregations are at, their history, their hopes and fears, and why they might be reacting as they are? Sometimes it takes time to ‘learn’ a new parish – particularly the new context and culture in which you find yourself.

I have not heard you preach, so I don’t know if you are offering ten minute reflections on Ezekiel or 45-minute sermons on three verses from the book of Acts. Have a think about how you are communicating and the illustrations that you use. Jesus was fantastic at using images that his community understood because they were all around them. It’s not a case of dropping the biblical preaching which is so important to you, but it may be a case of listening as well as speaking in this place where you are still trying to understand how people tick.

WE’RE CALLED AS PREACHERS TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST, TO CHALLENGE PEOPLE TO FAITH AND ACTION, NOT TALK ABOUT OUR PETUNIAS.

Preaching is indeed central to ministry, but it is not the whole of ministry. The best preaching arises out of steady, long-term pastoral care for the congregation in the context of worship, administration of the sacraments and creative leadership. It may be that you just need to give the situation time, listen carefully, and build trust whilst preaching firmly, but with gentleness and generosity. Beneath most resistance to Christ there is deep longing to know the truth and an aching desire to live well. Keep going – but be patient with yourself and your people!

David Bracewell

David Bracewell was Rector of St Saviour’s Church, Guildford for more than 20 years. Now officially retired, he continues to travel the country, training and encouraging local church leaders. He is passionate about the role of the local church and believes the greatest mistake a preacher can make is to be boring.

Mandy Briggs

Mandy Briggs is a Methodist minister based in Bristol. As Education Officer at the New Room/John Wesley’s Chapel, she is exploring how to share the Methodist story with all ages (newroombristol.org.uk). She can also be found on Twitter: @mandbristol.
The rookie preacher

by Jules Middleton
I am a rookie preacher, just a few years on from my first-ever sermon, which was given with knees knocking, hands gripping notes and spit showering the microphone with alarming regularity. I’m not sure it’s improved much since to be honest. Of course we are all rookies to some extent; learning is a lifelong project. But here are some thoughts, dare I suggest, even advice, from the journey I’ve been on, learning to preach from the very beginning.

LEARNING TO SPEAK

Since perhaps the dawning of time (let’s not get too theological on that) the sermon has been the butt of many a joke, viewed as an occasion where people either sleep or ponder whether they remembered to feed next door’s cat. So the first challenge is how to get past that attitude.

Technically, things like not rustling your notes (annoying) and learning to use the microphone (or face the wrath of the sound desk person) are skills that can be learned, but speaking with confidence, passion and accessibility takes a bit more time. One tip I was given was to use personal stories to illustrate points. It helps you feel more confident, but more than that it’s often the stories from everyday life that illustrate the gospel in a way that is real and honest. Of course you can go too far with this and my friends now suggest that whatever they say over a glass of wine will end up in one of my sermons, and well, yes, that is often the case. (Hmm, I wonder if this means I can get wine on expenses?)

And then of course there is humour. There’s been much talk recently on clergy cracking jokes, which reminds me of a certain bishop I know who once told me he actually filed his sermon-suitable jokes according to date and place so he could recycle them at will! Of course being able to deliver a joke is key and I have to say this is not my forte, so I tend to steer clear of anything that requires a punchline.

GET A THICK SKIN

So you can talk, you’ve got some skills and feel confident. Brilliant. Now you need to get tough, because no matter what you say, people will comment on it. A gentle ‘nice sermon, Vicar’ on the way out, or possibly, at the other extreme, a lengthy and less subtle email the following day. So far, my favourite comment on one of my talks was focussed on how often I flicked my hair when I was preaching! Well, at least it wasn’t pointing out some hideous heresy I suppose...

The temptation, though, is to allow any criticism to rip apart everything you have carefully prepared (and probably sweated blood and tears over too). The best advice I’ve had on this came from a vicar who suggested that when you finish talking, just put your notes on the altar and offer it back to God. Such wisdom there, and I find it incredibly freeing now to put my notes down and know there’s nothing more I can do.

BE YOU

Feedback is of course incredibly useful when you are starting out, but better to ask a few people you trust and respect for ‘constructive criticism’, than listening to the comments at the church door. However, it’s also important to be you! Shaping your preaching style to that of your vicar or someone you have seen at a conference will only end in disaster. Developing a style in which you feel confident and comfortable will take time. You can always try things out and see what works for you (and for your audience, of course).

One of the best preaches I ever heard was read straight from a script, something I would usually find intensely annoying and rather dull. But, this was funny, heart warming, theologically sound (kind of important) and gripping. It was so good I didn’t care about the style! If you are an off-the-cuff chatterer however, just make sure you really have learned the skill of ad hoc speaking (which is definitely a skill) and to think quickly before you open your mouth. I inadvertently managed to suggest recently that our vicar was going to expose himself, and only realised what I’d said when I saw the entire front row in silent shaking hysterics.
BEING WELL-PREPARED WILL GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE IN WHAT YOU ARE SHARING. OF COURSE NO ONE WILL EXPECT YOU TO BE A BIBLICAL SCHOLAR WHEN YOU START OUT, SO DON’T TRY TO BE TOO CLEVER EITHER.

KNOW YOUR STUFF

Do your homework and prepare well! Nothing strikes fear into the heart more than hearing the service leader announce a sermon from John 13 when you have actually prepared a talk based on Mark 5. If you’re lucky you’ll have ten minutes to get yourself out of that particular hole and come up with something (and you’ll spend seven of those panicking). Being well-prepared will give you confidence in what you are sharing. Of course no one will expect you to be a biblical scholar when you start out, so don’t try to be too clever either. Quoting Greek is great if you actually know what it means but can be a tad risky if you don’t!

Knowing your audience helps too. When you start out you’re probably going to be speaking in one place regularly which is really helpful as you grow in confidence. But don’t assume that the same style of talk will work in all services, places and situations.

Oh, and, taking a whole week to write a sermon? Completely normal.

REMEMBER WHERE GOD IS!

Best advice of all: pray, pray, and pray again. And I don’t mean the pleading ‘please God let this be OK’ kind of prayer (which I never say before I preach, ahem…). Yes, it might be you speaking, but it won’t be you that impacts people, it will be the Holy Spirit working through your words, so if you don’t allow God into the preparation, how can you expect him to be in the delivery? Of course praying right before you step into the pulpit can be a risky manoeuvre, as I found one morning when I very clearly felt God telling me to rip up my notes and just speak. Cue downright terror…

Something I learned early on is that if we give the best of ourselves in the preparation, then we can confidently hand it over to God to do the rest. So if you’re a rookie (of however many years’ experience), keep doing that and you’ll be all right.

Jules Middleton

Jules Middleton is an ordinand in the Church of England, Mission Pastor at The Point Church in Sussex (a Fresh Expression with a very missional outlook); and also a wife and mum of three. She is passionate about sharing Jesus, especially through her blog and social media, through creative artwork and of course through preaching. She tweets as @redjules.
Preaching and new media

‘With the talked-of demise of the traditional churches and congregations – “these things will all pass” – the [younger] generation (who label us as needy, cash-strapped, old-fashioned, boring, middle-class and institutionalised) have already established their own “way to go”: big, praise-band venues with thousands of young, Spirit-filled Christians, and renting local community premises and schools for an hour or so – no financial overheads: praise be indeed!

“We older generation despair of gaining the attention of these tablet- and mobile-swiping youngsters, so “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” must be our modus operandi, and we need to “hack into” their thought rationale via social media and the internet, and of course local TV and radio, schools, café churches, etc.”

Maureen Jones (Local Preacher and great-grandmother), Wrexham

A timely nudge

‘After being a worship group member and then a worship leader in our church for around 20 years, I found I was getting “nudges” from God and others about becoming a Methodist Local Preacher but I didn’t think I could do the course. I am retired and felt it would be too difficult at my age – this was my excuse.

‘Then on 14 November, the “nudge” became a push. Still very much undecided, I talked it over with family, friends, and ministers. After one of these conversations with one of our ministers, I was teetering on the brink. I arrived home, opened the door, and there on the mat face up was the first issue of Preach. What better sign could I have? I started the faith and worship course, am now “on trial”, and am going to continue on the new local preachers’ course in September. Thank you Preach for helping me to make this momentous decision and for the contribution your magazine makes.’

Deirdre Moden, Spalding

Tribute to Marcus Borg

‘I am responding to Mike Dennis’ appeal for more content from a liberal theological perspective and John McCartney’s conservative/evangelical rejoinder. The writings of Paul Tillich and Don Cupitt were milestones on my personal journey of faith, although neither were accepted uncritically. Another major influence was Leslie Weatherhead’s The Christian Agnostic which I found both inspiring and liberating and a key factor in my becoming both a Methodist Local Preacher and a PhD in Psychology. However, my deepest debt of gratitude goes to Marcus Borg who, sadly, died in January of this year at the age of only 73. Borg gave me some wonderful constructs which I use frequently in preaching the gospel of Christ in a multi-faith society in a scientific age. Amongst these are (1) “The More”, a dimension of reality beyond the purely material universe, which transcends all major world faiths; (2) the distinction between the pre-Easter Jesus of history and the post-Easter Christ of faith; and (3) his analysis, with JD Crossan, of which letters attributed to Paul were most likely to be authentic. I would really value a full article paying tribute to the work of Marcus Borg. He is worth it!’

Dr Hugh McCredie, via email

Keep up the good work

‘You deserve congratulations for giving birth to Preach. What energy and vigour it offers – a fresh and exciting encouragement to anyone with a genuine concern about ministry. The challenge may be to maintain the high and inspiring standard that has been set in the first few issues. May God enable the leadership team so to do!’

Bob Weir, Radcliffe-on-Trent

WRITE TO US

We’d love to hear from you – whether you have thoughts on the features, ideas for future issues, experiences or inspiration about preaching or constructive criticism (please be kind – we are humans with feelings!). You can write to us at PO Box 2352, Watford, Herts WD18 1PY, email editor@lwpt.org.uk, or tweet us @preachmagazine.

Twitter

@LSTheology Great meeting with @preachmagazine/@joswinney today – exciting plans afoot!!

@JoshyBloor @PreachMagazine enjoying the Holy Spirit focus in the latest release :)

@gillun just arrived @preachmagazine with articles by @marikarose and @pmphilips. Looking good

Letters and tweets
Something happens when we speak

by Jenny Hawke
Something happens when we talk of God. Something mysterious is released invisibly into the atmosphere. When we verbalise the love and kindness, the mercy and the redeeming nature that is Jesus, a power hangs in the air even after we have moved on. The miracle that is God, is ready and waiting. Lives are affected; minds are quieted, and sometimes irrevocably changed. There is a trembling of movement, a breakthrough and a flow where before there was only stagnation, and there is fresh miraculous growth in areas of desert sands. God is on the move.

And does it matter so much what it is we say, word for word, and how we say it, or is it simply that by speaking out with a heart full of love we let God in? The miracle happens when we tell our own stories, of God’s unending love, of the possibilities for change, of the miracles then and the miracles now.

God is on the move. In lives that are chaotic, broken, and hopeless, he is on the move. Bringing hope to the darkest of places, speaking in dreams to those who are voiceless and washing the feet of the unsuspecting. He’s lifting the burden of hidden shame from world-weary shoulders, healing wounds long buried, and shouting out for justice for the innocent. We can only stand in awe and watch. And follow in his wake, hungry for more, desperate and willing to be part of the story that is unfolding now. Here. Right in front of us.

So we will tell the stories as we hear them, speaking out with fear and trembling. And the words? Let them come from our hearts, from our experience, from what we see and know, even though at times we don’t fully understand. As we speak, God is there. Like a following wind bringing the warmth of an eastern sun, he is there. And in the silence that follows, we can simply stand aside and let him be who he is.

Lord, we stand overwhelmed, By the simplicity of your message, By the strength of your love, And your hunger for justice.

We long to be part of this story, Of lives rebuilt, Of hopes restored, Of miracles and joy, Of perseverance and courage.

Give us hearts full of your irrepressible love With words which release your power, Hanging in the air with unseen dynamic force, Exploding through barriers of race, culture and creed And breaking down patterns of hatred and division.

Let us be on the move, Following you.
So they say

PREACHERS ON PREACHING

"Effective preaching starts with loving the people we’re preaching to."  
Adam Hamilton

"To be biblically balanced is to let our theology and preaching be proportioned by the Bible’s radically disproportionate focus on God’s saving love for sinners seen and accomplished in the crucified and risen Christ."  
Tullian Tchividjian

"Preaching is effective as long as the preacher expects something to happen – not because of the sermon, not even because of the preacher, but because of God."  
John Hines

"A “real pastor” is not preaching of their own; they are speaking what God put in their heart by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is using them at that very moment to speak to the congregation’s situations – past, present, and future."  
Monica Johnson

"Preaching on Sunday mornings is such a simple thing, and by complicating it, I think we all do ourselves and the audience a disservice. It is very simple. Here is the model: make people feel like they need an answer to a question."  
Andy Stanley

"It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."  
St Francis of Assisi

"A man who first tried to guess “what the public wants,” and then preached that as Christianity because the public wants it, would be a pretty mixture of fool and knave."  
CS Lewis

"Preach as if Jesus was crucified yesterday, rose from the dead today, and is returning tomorrow."  
Martin Luther

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MAKING NOTES

WHY PEOPLE ARE WRITING THINGS DOWN DURING THE SERMON

- Shopping list composer
- Student noting down interesting exegesis
- Plain-clothes clergy member writing down sermon for re-use
- Individual writing things down as recommended by anger management expert
- Boffin attempting hymnboard Sudoku
- Last minute intercessions compiler
- PCC member crafting resignation letter
- Cartoonist recording their observations

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This cartoonChurch.com cartoon was created by Dave Walker for support from Church Times.
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