

Preaching Beyond the Pulpit: A Proposal for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Preaching  
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*Abstract: In a search for authenticity a post-modern world has found solace in many arenas except the Church. The Emerging Church has attempted to reconcile the severed relationship between the postmodern world and the Church by revamping how church is done. Yet, some have sacrificed the Word of God in this pursuit. Is it possible to suggest a model for preaching that would communicate the Word of God authentically in the midst of vibrant relationships in and outside the pulpit?*

As a pastor I have poured over sermons and prayed for God to work. I have come home after preaching and wondered if anything happened. I have turned to books on preaching and church growth in the hopes of expanding the Church's influence. Yet, there has always been something that has steered me away from these new strategies. The thing that has held me back is that I believe in preaching, and believe even more in the power of the Word of God. Sermons play a powerful role in proclaiming the good news to anyone who will listen. Beyond finding new tactics for expanding the Church, I am convinced that we need to be grounded in what God calls pastors and preachers to do. It is my opinion that the work of preaching is not solely for Sundays, but includes communicating God's Word in areas beyond scheduled worship services. I think that by broadly approaching preaching our scope of ministry will lead us to preaching beyond just Sunday sermons.

This paper will proceed in three stages. First, identifying the diversity of preaching found in both the Old and New Testaments will serve as a foundation for approaching the topic of 21<sup>st</sup> century preaching. Secondly, with the biblical backdrop, we will then be positioned to discuss what authentic preaching looks like from the pulpit on Sunday morning. Thirdly, I will then outline a model for preaching beyond Sunday Sermons. I am not so bold as to suggest that this is the only model for 21<sup>st</sup> century preaching, but at least a proposal worth considering.

Before I proceed further, I am compelled for the sake of clarity, to outline my assumptions and convictions with regard to preaching. All that I say in this paper should be seen as a plea for preachers and colleagues to trust in the power of God's Word to do its work. I do not believe that God's Word needs to be manipulated in order to be understood in our generation, but rather preached for what it is, God's Word. Furthermore, as Stewart states, the Bible is modern and contemporary: "It requires no tricks or manipulation to bring it up to date. It is our story" (King Forever, 1975, pg 46). It is tempting to cut corners and tickle people's ears so they will come to church. I am suggesting that Scriptures are not in need of gimmicks or tricks, but clear and bold proclamation. Stewart further suggests,

We feel that there is not enough happening in the church. That is probably

perfectly true. The church's impact on society is only fractional compared with what it ought to be. But when we want to do something about it, so often our first impulse is to say, "we must get busy and overhaul the organization, we must oil the ecclesiastical machinery, we must demand that our divinity colleges turn out skilled administrators above everything else, we must institute a new kind of propaganda set up another committee, resuscitate the parochial system, democratize our structures." God forgive us! That is what we concentrate on. And no doubt, in a way, it is important enough. But are there no prior questions? Have we been giving the Holy Spirit room to work? Are we waiting on the Lord to renew our strength? Are we alive to the reality of the supernatural? Do we know what it means to say "O Lord our God, we rest on thee?" (King Forever, 1975, pg. 36).

Our goal is to let God be God and transform human hearts. Changing aspects of church might have a place but is not our first avenue in reaching this generation. It is my conviction that this generation does not need preachers, pastors, and teachers simply telling others what to do, but leaders living the Scriptures in the trenches of the world. Michael Quicke accurately notes,

Humankind needs salvation, and the same story has to be told in each generation. Its source is in Jesus the Word made flesh, yet it has to be told through the words, experiences, and flesh of preaching. Preachers must therefore stand under Scripture and the lordship of Christ and also in the contemporary world to embody God's Word in their words and persons (Quicke, 2003, pg. 25).

The implication is that if the Word is communicated accurately, whether on Sundays behind a pulpit, or on Monday's at the gas stations, people's lives can be utterly transformed. I believe that churches and pastors should seek to be those who go into the world, not just expect the world to come in and hear them. Thus, in my opinion, our time would be better served taking the church to the world rather than changing church to be more user friendly to the world.

There are many individuals better equipped than I that have developed effective models for preaching and designing sermons. It is not my desire to regurgitate those methods, but to suggest that the models given to us for effective communication have more use than just Sunday mornings. My plea is to take some of the philosophies of expository preaching out into the streets. By road testing these models in the trenches I think we will find that many will respond to God's Word and make eternal decisions to become disciples of Christ, not just church members.

#### The Word and Its Far Reaching Work

Both the Old and New Testaments are inundated with the Word of God being preached within a specific culture. God shows up as the first preacher and speaks creation into

being. From that point forward the communication of God's Word has been central in the development and direction of God's people. Thus, it seems accurate to assume that this would not change for Christians to be faithful to God's spoken and written word. The role of proclamation as an avenue of God's work functions in many ways; to call His followers to obedience, aid them in the knowledge and experience of His character (Habakkuk), recognize His power in suffering (Job), express His sovereignty over the world, etc. Essentially, God proclaims Himself as God and invites those who preach to do the same. Paul's exhortation to the Roman Church in chapter 10 is foundational for our understanding of the reason for preaching. His application in verses 14-17 is that faith arrives when the Word of Christ is heard and preached. Paul's message is not only to the Christians in Rome but also to the nation of Israel (who have departed from God's Word). His point remains applicable in our generation that faith in God through belief in Christ comes, in part, when the Word of Christ is accurately preached.

That being said, the Bible must then be the fundamental starting point for the homiletic enterprise. On a practical level, a preacher cannot preach, in the truest sense of the word, without the material of the Bible, regardless of how he views its nature and purpose. On a theological level, the Old and New Testaments testify to the fact that God seeks to communicate with His people. This communication entails many things, not the least of which is His desire to see His creation return to Him. Hence, all that the Bible communicates is central to what we as preachers are called to preach. The Bible's relevance transcends any culture or time and for that matter any given context. This being true would imply that preaching can and should take place in every possible situation. Broadly speaking, preaching is an event in which God's Word is communicated to a specific audience. Even if that audience is one individual, preaching has occurred.

I am suggesting that preaching takes place when we communicate God's story both behind and beyond the pulpit. Much of our training emphasizes the crafting of a sermon and its delivery to an audience. This training is crucial and essential for us to preach clearly and accurately to a congregation. My exhortation is that the development and delivery of expository sermons must be given in a diversity of contexts where other individuals other than the gathered church are the recipients. Furthermore, those sermons must be crafted from preachers bathing themselves in Scripture, as well as touching the lives of individuals in the world. Thus, our time spent in study for developing a sermon for a worship service should also be time spent in struggling with how we can preach messages like these to people we are connected with in the world. We share God's story, our story, with them and watch the Word of God work.

### Authentic Preaching and Sunday Sermons

How we preach, and how we live what we preach has always been inseparable. With the downfall of so many prominent preachers in the last few decades authenticity is a central concern for many who hear the message. There are many individuals who, rightfully so, want to know the message we preach is significant beyond just Sundays. There is no longer an inherent credibility of standing in the pulpit on Sunday heralding God's Word.

Disingenuous preachers and preaching are held up as the norm as the world waits for someone to live what they preach. Some will offer us latitude in our sermons on Sundays, but many are not there. The world is waiting for us to preach and live out the message in the trenches the rest of the week. The desire for genuine relationships and bone fide community seem to be the seedbed in which our message is preached. The irony is that many are finding what they are looking for in virtual communities. The explosion of internet communities like My Space and the abundance of blogging seem to indicate peoples deep desire to be cared for and valued. With a few clicks of a mouse anyone is able to tune in to the deepest parts of people's lives. Things people think hold a lot of currency and relationships provide hope for empty human hearts. Many feel significant because they are able to share their thoughts and voice their opinions, even if the community they desire so deeply is merely virtual on-line.

The journey from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> has been one of innumerable changes. A major shift from modern to post-modern has left preachers with the challenge of communicating to a generation that no longer accepts the Bible as truth. Growing up in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, many of my memories of life were about living in a world where I could enjoy life as long as I stayed within the rigid norms of that generation. The constraints and rules set down offered stability and made many experiences predictable, especially church. In our day and age what used to be non-negotiables have now been put up for discussion. This impact is seen in our preaching. We, rightfully so, focus more attention on narrative preaching and the use stories to bring biblical truths to light. Our greatest challenge as preachers is that we can preach wonderfully powerful expository messages that affect individuals in this post-modern generation, but many in this generation are not there to hear it. Church is one of many daily opportunities and can be taken or left at any time. I remember as a kid watching reruns of America's favorite dog, Lassie. She was a symbol of the ever-faithful dog that would do everything necessary to save her young owner Timmy from danger. Many times she was seen barking at the front porch of the house heralding the message that Timmy was in danger. Throughout the course of my ministry I have felt much like Lassie. I have preached to the church, heralding that many in our community are lost and dying and that they have the message that will give them the hope they desperately need. Yet, without the message of Christ they are stuck and their lives are in peril. The outcome of every Lassie story is that the people on the porch understood the message and followed her. They followed Lassie because she knew where the danger was; she was intimately connected with Timmy. I believe that preachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to learn from Lassie. Initially, by preaching a message of hope to those in danger outside the Church. Secondly, that preaching the Word on Sundays would enable Christians to have an experience of God that empowers them to minister back in the world. Thus, I would like to suggest that although the cultural context in which we preach offers significant challenges, they are opportunities we are simply ignoring. Much like Lassie we have a message of salvation that needs to be heralded to those in danger and we stand amidst the Christian body asking them to do the same.

Our cultural struggles are no different than what Christ dealt with in Matthew 11. The scene is John the Baptist in prison sending his followers to ask Jesus if he is the one for

whom they are waiting. Through Jesus' response it is concluded that He is the long awaited Messiah. Then Christ turns to the crowds and begins to preach. His message begins with the validation of the ministry of John the Baptist. Then, in His next movement, Christ begins His cultural analysis. He says in verse 16,

But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.

In His examination of the culture Christ communicates that many were prepared through the Old Testament to look for signs of the coming of the Messiah. They had all the signals but didn't believe. They had right before them exactly what they were looking for but refused to believe. Yet, in the infinite wisdom of God, after Jesus pronounces judgment, He offers them a promise, the same promise we hold out to the world as we preach. He says in verse 25,

I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

God is still calling people to salvation and inviting them to rest in Him. By God's sovereign grace people will respond. Therefore, it is my conviction that God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have called us as preachers to preach beyond just Sunday mornings. In our ministry we would seek opportunities in the world to preach the living message of the gospel to dying hearts and encourage those we disciple to do the same.

Preaching Beyond the Pulpit:

In setting out my proposal I am aware of the rich diversity of pastors and preachers who reside in the pulpit every week. I am not suggesting that all preachers look the same or carry out the task of preaching the Gospel in the same way. What I do believe is essential is that we as preachers must live authentically in a world that is deeply searching for what is real is essential. By being intentional in our ministry with the outside world we show Christ as real in the mess of the world. The challenge to this approach to preaching is that we will find ourselves in the messiness of people lives and stretched beyond what is

familiar. In my opinion these dangers are a necessary risk for the sake of the Gospel. I share Stewart's assessment when he states,

There is one thing, and one thing alone, which can rescue the preacher from the immense besetting dangers of his position. And that is to have his own spirit bathed in the atmosphere of worship, awed and subdued and thrilled that Christ should come so near (Heralds of God. 1948, pg 38).

Since we are beyond the time when preachers possessed an inherent credibility from their position, we must address people's overt skepticism. The plea is that we must live and preach everyday in the trenches of the world and cease to expect people from the outside to come in and believe what we say. There are faithful Christians who attend church every Sunday and listen to God's Word preached and they need to see that we as preachers are living and longing to share the message with the lost. What follows are a few areas in which God has opened the doors for this to take place in the context in which I preach. My desire is that these would serve as examples, not necessarily to be replicated, but used as a platform to imagine where God might take preachers to share the good news.

#### The Gospel and the Gas Station:

As every pastor and preacher knows Sunday mornings are difficult. They are normally filled with last minute refinements on the Sermon, time spent in prayer for those who attend and dealing with the final details of the service. In order to prepare for the hectic day, I make my way to the local gas station for a cup of freshly brewed coffee. The first few times it was fairly simple - I poured my coffee, paid for it, and left. One Sunday I went in and saw the usual faces, gave them each a smile and a nice hello. As I paid for my coffee I asked, "Hey if you didn't have to work, would you ever think about coming to church?" A few scoffed, others pondered, but every week since I have shown up and discovered a little more about their lives. They share their stories of pain and heartache, difficulties with relationships, family problems, etc. Every Sunday, without fail, God grants me the opportunity to preach before I ever open the doors of the Church. They ask me questions about baptism; how God views having a child when you're not married, how to deal with death, the reality of hell, and how does God feel about me. As I pour over the Scriptures and pray for God's direction I relate biblical stories and biblical events that are applicable to their situations and let them know how much Christ really cares.

It is my suggestion that it is precisely this type of preaching that God calls us to do. Numerous definitions have been given of expository preaching each with different nuances, but most with the same concerns. Michael Quicke notes,

It is my conviction that preaching is nothing less than sharing the in-breaking of God's good news to create a new people in a new community. Christian preaching, at its best, is a biblical speaking/listening/seeing/doing event that God empowers to form Christ shaped people or communities... Preaching is about

God communicating his will and purpose with power and immediacy to effect change...Preaching, at its best, is a God happening, empowered by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Quicke, 2003, pg. 27).

What Quicke accurately suggests is that a God-event takes place when preachers preach. Listeners' lives are affected by the power of the Word of God. Another popular and widely accepted definition is that of Haddon Robinson. He defines expository preaching this way,

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived for and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers (Robinson, 2001, pg. 21).

Both definitions guide us in our preparation of sermons. Neither suggests that expository preaching must only be carried out in a church during a worship service. I am sure that some of this might be implied, but it is my conviction that expository preaching can and must be carried out in diverse venues for the sake of reaching individuals in a post-modern generation.

#### Fires, Car Wrecks, and Christ

In addition to the Sunday morning preaching that takes place at the gas station, there have been other venues that have been used by God to present His message to the world. Early on in the context of my ministry it was evident that others were skeptical of an outsider coming in and changing their church. So finding a way to get involved in their lives and in the community seemed crucial. I quickly joined the volunteer fire department and medical response teams and began to live in their world. One hundred and twenty hours of training is required to be a certified firefighter and an additional two hundred to be licensed as an Emergency Medical Technician. These trainings allow for plenty of time to get into the nitty-gritty details of people's lives and preach the Gospel. Furthermore, our department had no existing chaplain so I was voted to assume those duties as well. Little did I realize what would transpire in the coming years. Most of my counseling experiences the first couple of years were not with people from church, but people from the fire department and medical response teams. Many life changing and difficult circumstances have taken place in their lives. Each instance is another opportunity to give them hope through faith in Jesus Christ. We also fought fires, pulled people out of cars, and served our community together. Our department has had some very difficult emergencies in the past few years - deaths from automobile accidents, deaths of children, and suicides. These events leave each of the responders with lots of questions and many opportunities for me to communicate the Gospel as they search for answers to understand what we saw. Yet, outside of solely preaching to the first responders, God has opened many doors by being the chaplain. I have been able to follow up with family members in our community who recently experienced emergencies and offer them hope and the knowledge that God cares. We as a department have been involved every year since

September 11, 2001 in performing a memorial service for those fallen heroes. The last three years they have invited me to preach and pray in honor of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. The department has become a family, as well as a group of listening seekers who struggle with the deep issues of life. I am convinced that our post-modern world seeks to know that pastors and preachers love them and in this way know that God loves them too. Preaching beyond the pulpit becomes less of a model and more of a lifestyle. I offer one further example about the opportunities God opened to me to preach beyond the pulpit.

#### Soldiers and Salvation:

The war in the Middle East has taken an incalculable toll on soldiers and their families. Parents struggle watching their sons and daughters shipped overseas into an uncertain and volatile situation. Spouses fear the worst as they watch their loved ones leave. Through my relationships with people in the fire department, I was invited to a deployment ceremony for a son who was being shipped to Ramadi, Iraq. We stood together as the general said some encouraging words and thanked them for their service. The soldiers all had brave faces while inside they were just as scared and nervous as their loved ones. We watched, hugged, clapped, and cried. The vans pulled away and the uncertainty was overwhelming and got the best of us. I listened, they cried. I prayed, they cried. I hugged, they cried. I preached and told them about hope and peace, they cried. Each day was as difficult as the next. Information was forthcoming, so I visited and shared, told them Christ cared and prayed. During this time I became involved with the National Guard volunteer chaplains. We received training on grief counseling, reintegration, and how best to support our soldiers. Through this I was put on the causality notification list. This meant that if any soldier in our community was killed in action I would be called and an officer would pick me up to go and notify the family. Thankfully, to this day I have yet to be called upon, but the opportunity to offer Christ to anyone who is hurting and broken is something I warmly welcome. We must realize that preaching beyond the pulpit means we will find ourselves in the most difficult and tragic of circumstances. Many of the stories related to us in the Gospel about the ministry of Jesus carry the same overtones. Prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners, adulterers, parents with lost children, demon possessed individuals, bleeding women, etc. are all recipients of the preaching of Christ. I believe that this type of preaching is what God is calling us to in the post-modern world.

In order to legitimately carry out this task we must constantly be involved in careful exegesis of Scripture beyond the text from which we are preaching. As a result, this then would be less of a model and more of a life-style. Stewart suggests,

Now it is this potential permeation of one personality by another, which makes spiritual religion possible. It is this that promotes the mystical union. But seeing that personality as it is 'in Christ' has far greater resources, both of self-impartation and of receptiveness, than it has anywhere on the purely human level, it follows that there can exist

between Christians and their Lord a degree of intimacy and unity absolutely unparalleled and unique (A Man in Christ, 1975 pg 166 ).

This level of intimacy will lead to opportunities to preach the truth of Scripture to the world and the Church. We would find ourselves spending free moments in the study of God's Word in order to correctly handle the life issues we are presented with everyday. We would accurately preach the Word of Christ to those who are dealing with specific circumstances offering immediately application for their lives. This also allows for follow up with how God's Word impacted them.

Much discussion has been about our present cultural situation and how to adapt our ministries to meet the needs of the upcoming generation. Each generation has sought effective methods to reach them and attempted to follow Christ's bidding to seek and save the lost. The passion behind this paper is that instead of revamping church, changing sanctuaries, becoming more existential, sidelining God's Word, or ceasing preaching all together we would continue preach both in and outside of the pulpit. I suggest we take the proven faithful Scriptures to the world and watch God work. The authenticity that our generation desires will be found when they meet the authentic Christ and authentic preachers preaching His message.

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