

“Essential Preaching”

A Scribe Seeks Homiletic Treasures From Both The Old and New

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PREFACE

When I entered a year of postgraduate studies at Duke University in the fall of 2001, I knew by my assignment from the Navy that my focus was to be homiletics – the study of preaching. I was fortunate to get such an opportunity, to concentrate in a discipline where we as Navy chaplains have grown indifferent, often communicating to a changing and dynamic generation of young service members with the tools of the past.

I had a wonderful experience at Duke with professors that both challenged and shaped my way of thinking as a preacher. Ellen Davis was no exception. She was a careful scholar, a thorough mentor, and a student of Lancelot Andrewes, the distinguished Anglican preacher of England's kings and queens. I had never heard of Andrewes. The reason was fairly understandable. He preached in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and most of his sermons at the library are found in books preserved in plastic bags, stacked in a dark room somewhere!

There were many good and obvious reasons it seemed, not to give ol' Lancelot a great deal of my attention. His sermons were long, tiring manuscripts that took Andrewes himself an hour to get through, about fifty-five minutes longer than the average sailor or Marine would allow their preacher on a Sunday morning. Andrewes's homilies were also written in the thick language of the King's English, woven together with three or four other languages of his choosing. Simply put, reading Andrewes was not like reading Fred Craddock, Barbara Brown Taylor, or David Buttrick! And remember, the Navy sent me to study preaching in the contemporary context of the military setting. This could be a hard sell

From the very first Andrewes sermon read, I was moved not so much by his content, but by his contact. I'll admit that such an experience is not unusual for any one of us who listens firsthand to an inspiring or effective preacher. But with Andrewes, I encountered a life giving homiletic that transcended the antiquated form of his text and my inability to actually *hear* him preach. He was intentional in his use of words, words crafted to build rich images that captured the attention of his listeners. At times the imagery produced a dramatic encounter with the hearer, and was able to bring to life biblical ideas by making correspondence with the things of daily existence. Once engaged with the listener, he demonstrated a careful process of staying connected, appealing to the conscience with grace and room for one to respond within the realm of possibilities.

My mind immediately wondered to men and women of our Sea Services, who are captivated in their daily lives by short slogan and rhyme, by an endless stream of images that engage the senses and draw them in. Though the three and half minute attention span of the average twenty year old would not have fared well with the exhaustive manuscripts common in Andrewes's day, the visual impact of his "philologic," along with the dramatic nature of his narrative would have connected with them in an instant. In a fascinating sort of way, Lancelot Andrewes possessed certain tools which work beyond the centuries to translate into a relevant homiletic for any generation.

This project is not a recommendation that the Andrewes sermon itself serves us well as a homiletic model for the postmodern culture of our day. But in the unfolding of some of his strengths as a preacher, drawing from his unusual gift, we might be able to better understand the kind of preaching goals useful and relevant for today's homily. Like the Gospel parable of Matthew 13:52, I will endeavor to bring from the scribe's

treasure, God's preaching wisdom in things both old and new. Chapter One of this project will initiate an analysis of five Lancelot Andrewes sermons, extracting from them choice homiletic goals principal for our discussion. Chapter Two surveys the distinct elements of style that are found in the entire corpus of Andrewes's work, noting the ones especially suitable and desirable for contemporary preaching. Chapters Three and Four pursue an identification of the postmodern ideologies and culture of today's service men and women, with a practical response that will encourage our Navy chaplains to preach in a "language" that speaks to their generation.

CHAPTER ONE

Lancelot Andrewes, A Legacy of Great Preaching: Five Homiletic Goals

The legacy of a preacher reaches beyond the skillful and careful creation of one sermon, or a lifetime of sermons. Greatness in preaching is first forged and fashioned in the preacher's soul, a soul faithful to God through the uncertainties of societal change, then vested in relevant and steadfast service to God's creatures. Lancelot Andrewes found prominence in both. His life of 70 years (1555-1626) proved vital to the English Church as both scholar and preacher. Perhaps as significant for today's church was his relentless example to embrace the things that mattered most, a commitment which first shaped his life, then flowed with steady strength into ministry.

Not unlike the preachers of the 21st century, Andrewes knew all too well the challenges of standing fast amidst the instability and upheaval of a changing world. The world of medieval Christianity, in which the significance of every experience was ultimately determined through uniform points of view, no longer existed. On the other hand, society had not yet found stability and security for life in the emerging system of science and Renaissance humanism.¹ While in this suspension, the philosophical thought of Andrewes's day leaned more clearly toward secularism, where reliance upon faith and God gave way to personal independence and individual expression, a shift that surely reverberated loudly in Andrewes's ears.

¹ Steven Kreis, "Renaissance Humanism," *Lectures on Modern European Intellectual History*, 10 Jan. 2002, The History Guide, 9 Feb. 2002 <<http://www.historyguide.org/intellect.humanism.html>>.

Unprecedented reforms swept through the church as well, reforms that carried away an entire system of symbols and their meanings with the daunting tides of change. The years just preceding Andrewes's birth were the most turbulent in Europe's religious history, when England herself experienced alteration between Catholic and Reformed practice, only to emerge as a Reformation nation, founded upon Protestant understanding and uniformity of worship.² In two decades of service to the Court, this preacher found himself placed at the very epicenter of a radically restructured church, an oft times turbulent state, and a world stretching toward a new identity. Yet in these tenuous times, marked by "confusion, skepticism, and despair,"³ the bishop cast his anchor upon the fundamentals of personal faith and piety.

The verses of the *Preces Privatae*, Andrewes's personal diary of devotions, expose the intense inner life of one who clung to the necessity of spiritual reflection while navigating tumultuous waters. The backbone of the *Devotions*, Andrewes's daily meditations, spark a prayerful medley of praise, confession, petitions, intercessions, and thanksgivings organized for each day as well as special occasions. Its pages are not a collection of quotes, but appropriations and re-appropriations of traditional sources that shape his faithful response to God. When he met with a verse or clause or so much as a word from the Scriptures or the sermons of the Fathers, litanies, and liturgies of the early church that went to his heart, on the spot he would take the word down.⁴ Every verse of his devotions has some meaning or reference to himself. Each page, almost every line has some strong word in it, some selected, compounded and compacted word, some

² Ellen Davis, *Imagination Shaped*, (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1995) 12.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

heart-laden clause that served as the essence of that moment's interaction with the divine. Andrewes might pass over whole chapters and whole books till he came to what was God's indispensable for him that day.⁵ So that these mediations turned prayers uncover an unyielding grasp of theological and spiritual necessities, which in turn communicate and press the spirit and form of essentiality in his craft of preaching.

T.S. Eliot once observed of Lancelot Andrewes, "His sermons illustrate a determination to stick to essentials, an awareness of the needs of the time, a desire for clarity and precision on matters of importance, and indifference to matters indifferent."⁶ More specifically, his homiletic reveals that God's Word is the source, from which one discovers the things that really matter, the crucial things in an individual's life. A superb example of such resolve permeates the 1606 Nativity Sermon from Isaiah 9:6, evident in just the first few lines of the text.

"Is born," "Is given," sound as if they had been written at, or since the birth of Christ; yet were they written more than six hundred years before. There is no one thing so great a stay to our faith, as that we find the things we believe so plainly foretold so many years before. "Is born," "Is given?" nay – 'shall be;' speak like a Prophet: nay – "is;" "Speaking of things to come as though they were already past." This cannot be but of God.⁷

The "stay" of our faith, as he asserts here and in each one of his homilies, rests on Andrewes's abiding certitude in the continuity of Scripture's voice, the vital harmony of the two testaments which make for both steady faith and effective hermeneutic.⁸ Every

⁴ Alexander Whyte, *Lancelot Andrewes and His Private Devotions*, (London: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1896) 35.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Florence Higham, *Lancelot Andrewes*, (London: MCM Press, 1952) 27.

⁷ Lancelot Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons by the Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God, Lancelot Andrewes*, vol. I, (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841) 18. Underline is my emphasis.

⁸ This conviction of the Scriptures as indispensable certainly conveys the proper Anglicanism of the day. *The Book of Common Prayer, 1549* ordained as a necessary rule of liturgy, reading only "the very pure Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, or that which is evidently grounded upon the same." *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559*, ed. John E. Booty (London: Associated University Press, 1976) 16;

word dissected in the body of his sermons, every turn of phrase, each interpretation unfolded from the ancient languages finds its root in the same reliable sources,⁹ and it was Scripture which fed and nourished him beyond the rest. In a world where new streams of thought and controversy are competing for the hearts and minds of men, he articulates a consistent sensibility in the strength and security of God's enduring Word to say, "Those [points of religion] that are necessary [God] hath made plain; those that [are] not plain are not necessary."¹⁰

Andrewes's *tendencies to communicate the things that matter most* are demonstrated clearly in the Isaiah 9:6 sermon. He writes, "It is ever our first care to begin with, and to settle *the main point of the mystery* [of Immanuel, God with us], and after to look at our own benefit."¹¹ In deliberate, imaginative moves to establish the essential point, he explains the blessing of Immanuel utilizing a principal image of the physical world which is found in the text: "and the government shall rest upon His shoulder." Upon the bodily representation of "the shoulders" he describes the two natures of the one Person, Jesus Christ: *A Child ... born ... from beneath; and a Son ... given ... from above.* Then with rhythmic phrasing that mirrors the cadence of the liturgy which he so revered, he conveys his main point (in fact the entire gospel) in the brief juxtaposition of the two words:

All along His life you shall see these two: At His birth, a cratch for the *Child*, a star for the *Son*; a company of shepherds viewing the *Child*, a choir of Angels celebrating the *Son*. In His life; hungry Himself, to shew the nature of the *Child*; yet "feeding five

⁹ *Lancelot Andrewes, Sermons*, ed. by G.M. Story, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967) xix. One of Andrewes's earlier sermons expresses the sources of his homiletic appeal as laid down in Scripture and antiquity: "One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period..."

¹⁰ *Ninety-Six Sermon*, vol. I, 35. Cited in *Imagination Shaped*, Ellen F. Davis, 23.

¹¹ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 21. *Italics mine.*

thousand,” to shew the power of the *Son*. At His death; dying on the cross, as the “*Son of Adam*;” at the same time disposing of Paradise, as the “*Son of God*.”¹²

His move in this section of the homily proves efficient and practical. First, in economy and transparency of word, Andrewes demonstrates that effective preaching reaches beyond the abundance of words. Speaking the necessary word or image, the startling and strong word, and the word compressed makes better connection with the hearer and thus renders spiritual life. Second, the deep and mysterious thoughts of the Incarnation, the central doctrine of the gospel for Andrewes, runs through the course of this sermon in simple, understandable contrasts that join humanity’s frailty with God’s capability. As the preacher labors to define and refine the most essential through the body of the sermon, the critical profit of the Nativity emerges to meet the listener in the reoccurring image of the shoulders “whereon His government doth rest”¹³:

Now from these two [Child, Son] the Prophet argue to a third, to the point here of principal intendment. That if, for his government’s sake, He will bear so great things; bear their weaknesses as the lost sheep, bear their sins as the scape-goat; he will over the government itself, as in Deut. 32. He maketh the simile, stretch forth His wings, “as the eagle over her young ones,” and take them, and bear them between His pinions – bear them and bear them through. And this point I hold so material *Puer natus*, nothing, and *Filius datus*, as much without *Princeps oneratus*; for that is all in all, and of the three the chief.¹⁴

In these six words, we find all the words of this Christmas Day homily sifted into one essential benefit. A Child is born, a Son is given, but paramount in this birth is a Prince who comes to bear upon his shoulders all the weaknesses, burdens, and iniquities of humankind. Christ’s shoulders, as Andrewes suggests are “*super hanc petram* [upon

¹² *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

this rock]; upon them lieth the weight of us all.”¹⁵ Thus, the preacher offers the listener the indispensable “Bearer” and all He accomplishes in the *cratch* and the *cross*.

One of the distinguishing marks of an enduring sermon, both exegetically and spiritually, is its ability to communicate beyond static rhetoric, to do and perform something within the listener. The preacher as a servant of such an event labors to forge credible identification between pulpit and pew, a strength which characterizes Lancelot Andrewes. Using familiar words and patterns of speech, and then recognizable images, he identifies with the listener, and they with he. More importantly, I propose he practices the respectful guidance of his audience without push or prod, creating such identification with “encouragement and a surprising modesty of demand.”¹⁶ Andrewes understands that just as it is impossible for us to see something that is held up too closely to our eyes, so it is impossible for us to believe something pressed too forcefully into our minds and hearts. Preaching in this regard, “does not persuade one to respond in the sense of arguing the truth of the gospel; preaching sets the gospel in lived experience, genuine experience, so that truth will be acknowledged,”¹⁷ and the listener moved to care about and then act upon what is said. So the question that Andrewes helps us to face is “How will one come to care?”

Andrewes’s homiletic, as evidenced in the Good Friday sermon of 1604, is exemplary in that way. In two timeless and useful questions that prompt the hearer’s “care,” *he shapes the kind of presence that brings a matter before the consciousness and soul of his listeners, creating an openness of the heart*. The Lamentations 1:12 text: “*Have ye no regard, O all ye that pass by the way? Consider and behold, if ever*

¹⁵ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 21.

¹⁶ Ellen F. Davis, 25.

there were sorrow like my sorrow” provides the basis for Andrewes line of questioning. First, he stirs the conscience by asking an important question of all whom meet with holy rhetoric: What is distracting you today? What keeps you from getting something out of this sermon? Note how he probes his audience to consider the busyness and urgent demands of their lives as deterrents in the hearing of the Passion’s message.

First a general stay is made of all passengers, this day... **to them that go to and fro the day of his Passion, without so much as entertaining a thought**, or vouchsafing a look that way...”O all ye that pass by the way,” stay and consider. Which very stay of His sheweth it to be some important matter, in that it is of all. For, as for some to be stayed, and those the greater some, there may be reason; the most part of those that go thus to and fro, may well intend it, **they have little else to do**. But to except none, not some special person, is hard. What know we their haste? **Their occasions may be such, and so urgent**, as they cannot stay. Well, what haste, what business soever, pass not by, stay though. As much to say as, be they never so great, your occasions; they are not, they cannot be so great as this. How urgent soever, this is more, and more to be intended. The regard of this is worthy the staying of a journey. It is worth the considering of those, that have never so great affairs in hand...we have stayed all our affairs.¹⁸

Andrewes capably identifies the demands and distractions which “scream” loudly for the attention of his hearers. He leaves room for an individual to search and reflect, by proposing rather than imposing those things which stand in the way of one’s personal response.

Secondly, as previously mentioned, he approaches the text with a view toward the benefit and profit of active listening, an essential connection in disposing the listener toward a meaningful response. The pathos of the homily is evident in that Andrewes’s language helps the listener to understand why Christ *cares*, and in such a way that helps the listener to *care* as well. So it is here that he asks: What is in this for you and me?

¹⁷ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 33.

Then to be sure to bring us to regard, he urgeth this: “Pertains not all this to you?” Is it not for your good? Is not the benefit yours? Matters of benefit, they pertain to you, and without them love and all the rest may pertain to whom they will. Consider then, the inestimable benefit that groweth unto you from this incomparable love. It is not impertinent this, even this, that to us hereby all is turned about clean contrary; that “by his stripes, we are healed,” by His sweat we refreshed, by His forsaking, we received to grace. That this day, to Him the day of the fierceness of Gods wrath, is to us the day of the fullness of Gods favor.¹⁹

Andrewes makes clear the promises of the Passion for those who stop to consider the sacrifice of the Passion. The certainty of healing, refreshment, grace, and favor *will* extend from this “inestimable act of love,” to those who slow down, take notice, and regard the primacy of Christ’s death in light of all that life has to offer. Indeed, in every sermon Andrewes slows down the listener with probing questions, with reiteration of important ideas, and with the consistent reminder that salvation, as a gift of God, does not reach men automatically. It requires from them regard and response; as He had come to them, so they must also fix their eye on Him, and then come to Him.

If we doe not [Regard], it may pertain to us, but we pertain not to it; it pertains to all, but all pertain not to it. None pertain to it but they that take benefit by it; and none take benefit by it, but they that fix their eye on it.²⁰

An earlier sermon in his collection of Good Friday texts, the 1597 homily taken from Zechariah 12:10, highlights another traceable feature in Andrewes’s desire to shape the listening consciousness. Most often, in logical, closely articulated steps, he transports his message upon the vehicle of one phrase or word,²¹ ***producing a well-crafted image that transmits the text to the soul.*** The fuel for movement is, no doubt, Andrewes’s

¹⁸ Lancelot Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons by the Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God, Lancelot Andrewes*, vol. II, (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841) 141. **Bold type** added to emphasize the hindrances outlined in Andrewes’ logic.

¹⁹ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 153.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

²¹ G.M. Story, xliii.

precision of expression. For this preacher of the Court, thought and speech were inseparable. Henry Newman writes of such ability:

A great preacher is not one who merely can, as it were, turn on at his will any number of splendid phrases and swelling sentences; but he is one who has something to say and knows how to say it ... He writes passionately, because he feels keenly; forcibly, because he conceives vividly...He has the right word for the right idea.²²

Certainly, it was the contextual need of the listener on this Good Friday that pressed Andrewes's momentum toward creativity and impact. By 1547, iconoclasm had left its mark on the English church. At the heart of this change was the excision of familiar and beloved emblems from the church, images that were considered vestiges and reminders of an unwanted "popery."²³ For much of the Elizabethan adult generation, the Reformation had carried away a rich and resonant world of an iconic faith they both understood and appreciated.²⁴ In response to the dictates of the state, icons were marred, broken, scraped and melted down. Altars were drawn down, the walls whitewashed, and windows were broken or blotted out to conceal "feigned miracles".²⁵ So when Andrewes approached the pulpit on that day in 1597, the church had been stripped of the images which once communicated the color and texture of the Passion to God's people.

Hence, with the determination of a resourceful liturgist and the skill of a vigilant artist, he proceeds to adorn the church with verbal imagery. The sole idea of "looking upon" the dying Jesus who is "visibly crucified among us"²⁶ pushes its way line by line to "imagineer" something of detail and hue to the sermon's end. Andrewes pled, "There is

²² John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 219-220.

²³ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 480.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 591.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 478.

no part of the whole course of our Saviour Christ's life or death but it is well worthy of our looking upon."²⁷ He initiates his descriptive homiletic:

So that we must needs have an eye in the handling, first to the fact of the piercing. Expressing unto us the piercing, not with whips and scourges; nor of the nails and thorns, but of the spear-point ...the spear which pierced and went through, His very heart itself; for of that wound, of the wound in His heart, is this spoken. Therefore the *trans* is here a transcendent – through and through; through skin and flesh, through hands and feet, through side and heart.²⁸

Then with theological precision the preacher “thrusts” the *trans* of the text²⁹ even deeper than the bleeding heart, to include the wounding of body and soul. The “bloody” descript not uncommon for Andrewes, paints the crucifixion scene for a church sanitized by the zeal of reform.

So we extend this piercing of Christ farther than to the visible gash in His side, even to a piercing of another nature, not His heart only was stabbed, but His very spirit wounded tooIt is not a sword of steel, or a spearhead of iron, that entereth the soul, but a metal of another temper [a wounding, he goes on to say, of sorrow and reproach].³⁰

His strange and never else heard sweat-drops of blood plenteously issuing from Him all over his body, what time no manner of violence was offered to His body, no man then touching Him, none being near Him; that blood came from some great sorrow.³¹

Concerned that a complete representation of the Passion satisfies the minds of the listeners, Andrewes establishes the responsibility of the piercing, and with clever surprise he turns the attention from the dying Savior to the reader himself. “Our manner,” he

²⁶ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 120.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁹ Andrewes's sermons are a mosaic of multi-lingual scholarship. His sense of the integrity of the texts, his delight in language, and his reluctance to distort meaning by translation supported this habit. He wrote: “I wish no word ever be narrowed by a translation, but as much as might be, left in the latitude of the original tongue.” *Story*, xxxvii. Here the Latin *transfixerunt*, translated as “pierced through” is a word of gradation, more than *fixerunt*, or *suffixerunt*, or *confixerunt*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

writes, “is to lay it [the blame] upon the soldiers, that were the instruments, ...upon Pilate, the judge that gave the sentence...upon the people that importuned the judge...or upon the Elders of the Jews that animated the people. But Christ was pierced by *our* transgressions.”³² Note how he capably and creatively connects our body of cause with Christ’s body of Passion.

It was the sin of our polluted hands that pierced His hands, the swiftness of our polluted feet to do evil that nailed His feet, the wicked devices of our heads that gored his head, and the wretched desires of our hearts that pierced His heart. We that “looked upon”, it is we that “pierced Him”. Which bringeth it home to us, to me myself that speak, and to you yourselves that hear; and applieth it most effectually to every one of us, who evidently seeing that we were the cause of this His piercing.³³

Theological language and reflection in every generation require a model of preaching that is by nature a creative event and whose purpose is to open us to God’s movement in our lives. The tool in such an event is not a cold manuscript with words neatly organized on the page, but the enlivened, embodied words that transform the text. In this regard preaching is drama.³⁴

Perhaps in a style and skill uncommon in his day, Lancelot Andrewes *creates drama in the life of the text*. His work is a creative labor which constructs images that trap the imagination, thus providing an encounter between text and listener, between listener and God. Andrewes’s Resurrection homily of 1620 is dramatic encounter. The central figure in this sermon on John 20:11-17, is not the resurrected and glorious Christ, as one would expect for Easter’s triumphant story. Rather, Andrewes surprisingly

³² *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 125.

³³ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁴ Jana Childers, *Performing the Word*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 35.

appoints the “lead” to an outcast sinner named Mary Magdalene (Luke 7:36-50), a woman whose passionate persona communicates the pathos of the text.

“She loved much;” we cannot say, she believed much. For, by her *sustulerunt* thrice repeated, the second, thirteenth, fifteenth verses, it seems she believed no more, than just as much as the High Priests would have had the world believe, that *He was taken away*. We cannot commend her faith; her love, we cannot but commend. She was last at His cross, and first at His grave; stayed longest there, was soonest here; could not rest, till she were up to seek Him. Sought Him, while it was yet dark, before she had light to seek Him by.³⁵

Interestingly enough many of the features associated with drama in the traditional sense are present in this homily. One of the more striking qualities is that of *action*, the movement-of-spirit and spiritual energy which finds its direction from the “script,” and then moves outward toward the audience.³⁶ In this Easter homily, Andrewes orchestrates such an encounter for his listeners at Christ’s tomb. Rather than a still, inert presentation of resurrection ideas, this sermon is a mirror of movement. It is as though Andrewes holds a glass up to Mary, to a life that is moving and full of choices and conflict, desires and design. In such a reflection the listener is able to see himself, as Andrewes devises in this section of the homily.

“Mary stood by the empty sepulcher weeping ...” The Angels speak to her. And they ask her, *Quid ploras?* Why she wept, what cause she had to weep. They mean she had none, as indeed no more she had. All was in error, faithful tears, but blind; tears of grief but false grief, imagining that to be that was not, Him to be dead that was alive. She weeps, because she found the grave empty, which God forbid she should have found full, for then Christ must have been dead still, and so no Resurrection.

And this case of Mary Magdalene’s is our case oftentimes. In the error of our conceit to weep, where we have no cause; to joy, where we have as little. Where we should, where we have no cause to joy, we weep; and where to weep we joy.

³⁵ *Ninety-Six Sermons by the Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God, Lancelot Andrewes*, vol. III, (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841) 6.

³⁶ Jana Childers, 43.

False joys and false sorrows, false hopes and false fears this life of ours is full of –
God help us!³⁷

A vital nuance of this feature, within this and every narrative sermon, is the determination by the preacher to transport the hearers from conflict toward resolution.³⁸ In this regard, Andrewes moves the hearer in the way the text progresses, from the *disequilibrium* of an empty grave to the equilibrium of the risen Christ. Mary stands at Christ's empty grave with no answers. "They had taken away his life ... and they had taken Him away from her too."³⁹ So that when the risen Christ appears, her eyes still gaze into the emptiness of the grave. There was no body and no recognition either. Andrewes writes, "She not only knew Him not, but mis-knew Him, took Him for the gardener."⁴⁰ Noteworthy is the preacher's emphasis of resolution when Jesus calls out, "Mary."

When Jesus calls out her name, "she turns herself to say to Him, 'Rabboni'." And all this by a word of His mouth. Such power is there in every word of His; so easily are they called, whom Christ will but speak to. He did choose to be made known by the ear rather than by the eye. By hearing rather than by appearing.

He that was thought lost, is found again, and found not as He was sought for, not a dead body, but a living soul, nay, a quickening Spirit.⁴¹

Additionally, Andrewes does well to design *dramatic climate* or emotion in his preaching, a necessity if one hopes to facilitate encounter and engender belief within the listener. In this sense, he deploys textual imagery to create internal movement for the hearer, not as emotional manipulation, but as spiritual stimulation. In the John 20 text, this movement threads the emotion of love, personified in Mary's posture at the empty

³⁷ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 11.

³⁸ Jana Childers., 42.

³⁹ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

tomb, together with the emotions that touch the listener's lives. His text is Verse 11:

“But Mary *stood* by the sepulcher, *weeping*, and as she wept, she *stooped*, and *looked* into the sepulcher.”

The first in these words, *stabat juxta monumentum*, that “she stood by the grave,” a place where **faint love loves not to stand**. Bring Him to the grave, and lay Him in the grave, and there leave Him; but come no more at it, nor stand not long by it. Stand by Him while He is alive - so did many; stand, and go, and sit by Him. But *stans juxta monumentum*, stand by Him dead; Marie Magdalene, she did it, and she only did it, and none but she. *Amor stans juxta monumentum*.⁴²

Another in these, *she stood, and she wept*; and not a tear or two: but *she wept* a good as we say, that the Angels, that *Christ* himself pity her, and both of them, the first thing they do, they ask her Why she wept so? Both of them begin with that question. And in this is love. For if, when Christ stood at Lazarus' graveside and wept, the Jews said, *See how he loved him!* May not we say the very same, when Mary stood at Christ' grave and wept, *See, how she loved him?* Whose presence she wished for, His miss she wept for; whom she dearly loved, while she had Him, she bitterly bewailed when she lost Him. *Amor amarè flens*, “**love running down the cheeks**.”⁴³

“Standing,” “weeping;” Andrewes embodies love in these emotions to lace the sermon with dramatic texture and to connect to the immediate sensitivities of the audience.

Queen Anne's death in 1619 caused him to write:

And this I note the more willingly, now, this year, because the last Easter we could not so well have noted it. Some wept then; all were sad little joy there was, and there was a *quid*, a good cause for it. But blessed be God That hath now sent us a more kindly Easter, of this, by taking away the cause of our sorrow then that we may preach of *Quid ploras?* and be far from it.⁴⁴

It is obvious that Andrewes's intent reaches beyond the task of teaching. He stimulates his listeners to see beyond text and into their own situation. This sermon is not so much

⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

⁴² *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 7.

⁴³ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 18.

about lessons as illumination; not about persuasion, but epiphanies; not about decision, but discovery.

Without a doubt, the same faith preached in Lancelot Andrewes's sermons is summed up in the *Preces Privatae*. Or rather, the faith preached in the sermons is that which was lived by the preacher and is revealed to us in the devotions he quietly composed in solitude and study. Andrewes's *Devotions* reflect the personal life of a man with an acutely developed awareness of the problems of his day, and the precious intercessions of the Church he so loved.⁴⁵ He preached what he did his utmost to live: union with God in prayer, fasting, repentance, continual reorientation from the hearing of the Word, and participation in the Sacrament.⁴⁶ This participation, though personal, was never individualistic. His sermons did not emerge from a cloistered life, but were on the contrary ecclesial and *marked by a practical sense of a spiritual community made alive by faith*. Canon A.M. Allchin, a modern Anglican theologian, comments on Andrewes and his school in this regard:

There was sense of the uniqueness of the individual together with an appreciation of the value of what is corporate and traditional; there was an intuitive understanding that Christian life is not either inward *or* outward; it is inescapably both.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Nicholas Lossky, *Lancelot Andrewes, the Preacher (1555-1626)*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁷ A. M. Allchin, preface to George Herbert: *The Country Parson and the Temple*, ed. with an introduction by J. W. Wall, jun. (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York and London, 1981), pp. xi-xii. Cited in Nicholas Lossky, *Lancelot Andrewes, the Preacher*, 91.

The 1622 Nativity Sermon demonstrates the internal and external sensibilities of this faith in a way that has made this sermon one of Andrewes's most cherished pieces. Through the image of Matthew's "star of the East,"⁴⁸ he presses faith from both sides.

The text is of a *star*, and we may make all run on a *star*, that so, the text and day may be suitable, and Heaven and Earth hold a correspondence. S. Peter calls faith, *the daystar rising in our hearts*, which sorts well with the *star* in the text rising in the sky. That in the sky manifesting it self from above to them; this in their hearts manifesting it self from below to Him, to Christ. Manifesting it self by these five; by *the Confessing of it; by the Ground of it; by the Steps of it*, in their painful coming; by *Careful Enquiring; and by their devout Worshipping*. These five, as so many *beams* of faith, the daystar risen in their hearts.⁴⁹ Andrewes first stresses the astronomical star of the Nativity, which manifests a

physical, visible form to the Magi, leading them to Christ's place of birth. Without the form, faith has no aim for its feet. "It was but *vidimus, venimus*, with them; they saw and they came; no sooner saw, but they set out presently."⁵⁰ The star of heaven makes apparent the appearance of the "morning star" which causes the star of faith to rise, "the day star [which] arises in our hearts" (2 Peter. 1:19). It is in this way that Andrewes introduces the human response to the divine manifestation. This star of faith is a gift, but it demands a free outward response in the form of a long and arduous journey.

In light of the Reformation's affect on both faith's form and meaning within community life, Andrewes labors to restore a sense of security and stability in preaching this sermon. Stripped from the Church through revolt and reform, were the visible forms, the "ecclesial lights" which supplied solace for the community - her teaching magisterium and the central images of liturgical significance, all tangible representations

⁴⁸ Matthew 2: 1,2; "Behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem; saying, "Where is the King of the Jews that is born? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship Him."" Andrewes's translation provided in the *Ninety-Six Sermons*.

⁴⁹ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 250-251.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 257.

of the faith intended to stimulate faithfulness in the hearts of the participants.

Consequently, against the backdrop of such loss, the wise preacher of the Court moves to encourage both an inward *and* outward grasp of faith, a pastoral challenge meant to restore and retrieve communal confidence in both form and spirit.

To tell you, when it is in particular, I must put you over to the eleventh verse, where it is set down what they did and when they worshipped. It is set down in two acts p??s???e??, and p?sf???e??, *Falling down*, and *Offering*. Thus they did, thus we are to do; we to do the like when we will worship.

If He breathed into us our soul, but framed not our body, but some other did that, neither bow your knee, nor uncover your head, but keep on your hats, and sit even as you do hardly. But, if He hath framed that body of yours, and every member of it, let Him have the honor both of head and knee, and every member else ... If all our worship be inward only, with our hearts and not our hats as some fondly imagine, we give Him but one of three; we put Him to His thirds, bid Him be content with that, He gets no more than inward worship. And the Text is a *vidimus*; and, of a star; that is, of an outward visible worship, to be seen of all.⁵¹

On Easter Sunday, 1614, Andrewes delivered a responsive call for worshippers to bow at the name of Jesus, to kneel for communion as an essential recognition of Christ's sacrifice and Real Presence,⁵² a bold and rare summons to make before king and court. God, he suggested, "Will not have the inward parts only ... No: mental devotion will not serve: He will have, both corporal and vocal, to express it by."⁵³ The following Sunday, Andrewes was replaced in the pulpit and chastised through a sermon delivered by another preacher. "God will not have a bended knee, but an upright heart," the stand-in exclaimed. "He will not demand prostrated bodies but humbled souls, and when these things are within, then hang up your signs."⁵⁴ Perhaps the individuals bothered by the challenge to worship in such boldness did not understand Andrewes the pastor. For it is

⁵¹ Ibid., 262.

⁵² Peter E. McCullough. *Sermons at Court*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 114.

⁵³ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 333.

⁵⁴ Peter E. McCullough, 114.

apparent that his appeal was one of recovery rather than ritual, more concerned with corporate benefit than one's individual preference. After all, he sought to enliven the gathered church with the expressions that he learned in his own "closet of prayer."

Mined from the above selection of sermons, which virtually cover the entire chronological range of Andrewes's preaching ministry, are five major principles or proximate goals useful in any homiletic:

- ? **Communicates essentiality in a changing world**
- ? **Creates a connection between the text and the hearer**
- ? **Brings to life the text**
- ? **Provides a dramatic encounter for the audience**
- ? **Shapes a sense of community in faith**

Despite the obvious generational differences and the enormously dissimilar worldviews of Andrewes's day and the 21st century, these goals have a timeless quality which provides benefit to the student of contemporary preaching. In a closer look of the sermons studied in this piece, it appears that the means for reaching the five preaching goals are primarily met through his interplay of the sound and sense of words, the use of short, memorable phrases and sentences, and vivid imagery that fuses the sensory and abstract and makes immediate connection with the experience of the listener. The following section will briefly survey those distinct elements of his preaching style.

CHAPTER TWO

Distinct Elements of Andrewes Preaching Style

As mentioned previously, Lancelot Andrewes's sermons are enriched by other sources, yet his own prose style is quite unique. Most apparent is his love for words and the possibilities of language, a passion he demonstrates in numerous ways. It is clearly evident that he is committed to the sermon text itself, a characteristic noted by T.S. Eliot: "He could take a word and derive the world from it, squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning which we should never have supposed any word to possess."⁵⁵ Such is the trademark of Andrewes, to flavor whole passages, even entire sermons with a single word. The words he favors within this "philologic" are simple, mostly monosyllabic.

⁵⁵ G. M. Story, xxxi

One of the places where such enthusiasm exists is in the 1597 Good Friday sermon taken from Zechariah 12:10, in which Andrewes fixes the reader's gaze on the word "look," to describe the necessary effects of looking upon the crucified Christ with iteration. "For at every new looking some new sight will offer itself, which will offer some new reflection issuing from the beams of a heavenly mirror."⁵⁶ The entire sermon is built around how the reader looks upon the wounds of the dying Christ and looks into his broken heart and soul, to then understand the magnitude of God's love for all of humanity. In the Nativity sermon of 1606, he presses the homily in four, compacted words:

We have two words, "Child" and "Son;" neither waste. But if no more in the second than in the first, the first had been enough; if the first enough, the second superfluous. But in this Book nothing is superfluous. So then two diverse things they import. Weigh the words: "Child" is not said but *in humanis*, "among men." "Son" may be *in divinis*, "from Heaven;" God spake it, "This is My Son;" may, and must be, here.

Weigh the other two; "born," and "given." That which is born beginneth then first to have his being. That which is given presupposeth a former being; for be it must that it may be given.⁵⁷

Within this design, Andrewes conveys Christ's nature in *duality*, yet at the same time he reaffirms the *unity* of the Person of Christ on the notion of His "shoulders." This image of the shoulder, two sides of the back which have the capacity to bear a task, is supplied from the human body. The 'Child' and the 'Son;' these two natures make but one Person clearly; for both these have but one name, 'His name shall be called,' and both these have but one pair of shoulders, 'Upon His shoulders.'⁵⁸ It is in this diverse

⁵⁶ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 130.

⁵⁷ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

and unified image that the preacher announces the benefits of salvation to the hearer, as Christ alone has the capacity to bear the burdens of humanity.

Andrewes often imitates the rhythms and short breath units⁵⁹ of the Anglican liturgy as he builds sentences of words pregnant with meaning. His phrases and sentences are concise statements of belief and doctrine. The effect of this concision is twofold: it captures the attention of the listener and facilitates a memory of the text, which can then go home with the crowd in the form of application. Such a preference is expressed in a quote from Andrewes's sermon on the short text "Remember Lot's Wife": "it fareth with sentences as with coins: in coins, they that in smallest compass contain greatest value are best esteemed: and in sentences those that in fewest words comprise most matter, are most praised."⁶⁰

Some of these sentences are extraordinary, yet often so embedded in the text that the reader may overlook their beauty.⁶¹ Such is the power in the beloved Wise Men sermon of 1622, wherein lie many brilliant sentences: "The star in their hearts cast one beam out of their mouths"; "The light of the star, in their eyes, the word of Prophecy in their ears, the Beam of His Spirit in their hearts; these three make up a full *vidimus*"; "Saint Peter call faith 'the day star rising in their hearts', which sorts well with the star in the text rising in the sky. That in the sky manifesting itself from above to them; this in their hearts manifesting itself from below to Him, to Christ." At other times Andrewes develops entire paragraphs from these sentences, as in the case of the 1620 Resurrection sermon of Mary Magdalene.

⁵⁹ Davis, 20.

⁶⁰ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 61.

⁶¹ Trevor A Owen, *Lancelot Andrewes*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 67.

But Mary stood. That is as much to say others did not, but she did. *Peter* and *John* were there but even now. Thither they came, but not finding Him, away they went. They went: But *Mary* went not, she stood still. To the grave she came before them, from the grave she went to tell them, to the grave she returns with them, at the grave she stays behind them. To stay while others do so, while company stays, that is the world's love: But *Peter* is gone, and *John* too: all are gone, and we left alone; then to stay, is love, and constant love.⁶²

Certainly Andrewes's work reveals a fascination with the structure of language, but it exhibits a fascination with the interplay of sound and sense of words as well. His sermons are teeming with wordplay, exaggeration, and antithetical surprise. He frequently rhymes words, as in the proposed response to one born in a stable, "more like to be abhorred than adored of such persons." Andrewes delights in exaggerations as he does in describing the depth of Mary's love, enough love to carry the stolen body (or at least she thought) back to the empty tomb.

"If he would tell her where He had laid Him, she would go fetch Him, that she would. Alas poor woman, she was not able to lift Him. There are more than one, or two either, allowed to the carrying of a corpse. As for His, it had more than an hundred pound weight of myrrh and other odors upon it, beside the poise of a dead body. *Ego tollam* seems rather the speech of a porter, or of some lusty strong fellow at least, than of a silly weak woman. But love makes women more than women; at least it makes them have the courage above the strength, far.⁶³

This playful use of words serves to "tease out spiritual truths hidden in familiar things and to show surprising relations among seemingly dissimilar phenomena."⁶⁴ This style of poetic preaching known as "wit," introduced the listener to a language of understanding and imagination which utilized nature, history, daily life, and above all the words and images of Scripture. The result of such a "philologic" better connects text and listener, and increases the possibility of the hearers remembering the sermon.

⁶² *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 7.

⁶³ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 19.

⁶⁴ Davis, 4.

Contrast and antithesis dominate much of Andrewes's "wordsmithing," found both in short phrase and paragraph. Striking are such instances, as in the occasion of Mary's belief that Christ's body had been stolen, "for want of belief He was risen, she believed He was carried away. She erred in so believing; there was error in her love, but there was love in her error;" and in the line repeated in four of his sermons,⁶⁵ "that the Word not be able to speak a word, he that thundereth in Heaven cry in a cradle, he that so great and so high should become so little as a child, and so low as a manger." A magnificent specimen of antithesis is found as Andrewes speaks of the Angels who appeared at the empty tomb of Christ, "For a grave is no place for Angels, one would think; for worms rather: blessed Angels, not but in a blessed place."

The attention he gives to specific words in his sermons parallels the attention he gives to the physical and material detail which surround those words. For him, those details are translated into a moral and spiritual dimension for the hearer, a valuable tool for a preacher concerned with application. The famous *Venimus* section describing the journey of the Magi is filled with flashes of detail, pressing one to evaluate his willingness to make personal sacrifices in the worship of Christ.

This was nothing pleasant, for through deserts, all the way waste and desolate ... for over the rocks and crags of both Arabias, specially Petraea, their journey lay ... lying through the midst of the black tents of Kedar, a nation of thieves and cut-throats; to pass over the hills of robbers, infamous then, and infamous to this day ... It was no summer progress. A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey in. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, the very dead of winter.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, Nativity Sermons II, IV, VI, and XII.

⁶⁶ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 257.

The typical Andrewes sermon reveals certain trends in paragraph development, sometimes through reiteration or a series of antitheses; and still another development illustrates an expansion in space or a progression in time.⁶⁷ Some of the paragraphs of reiteration give the initial impression of being needlessly repetitive, yet on close reading one finds that the paragraph in Andrewes prose is enhanced by the power and richness of imagery. As shown in the Zechariah 12:10 Good Friday text, both Scripture and the early Fathers were primary sources for such opulence of imagery. Here with the aid of Isaiah and St. Bernard he develops a metaphor of love, derived from the nails that pierced Christ's hand, and the spear that pierced His heart.

So that He was pierced with love no less than with grief, and it was that wound of love made Him so constantly to endure all the other. Which love we may read in the palms of his hands, as the Fathers express it out of Esay 49. 16; for "in the palms of His hands He hath graven us," that He might not forget us. And the print of the nails in them, are as capital letters to record His love towards us. For Christ pierced on the cross is *liber charitatis*, "the very book of love" laid open before us.

And again, this love of His we may read in the cleft of His heart. *Quia clavus penetrans factus, est, nobis clavis reserans*, saith Bernard, *ut pateant nobis viscera per vulnera*; "the point of the spear serves us instead of a key, letting us through His wounds see His very bowels," the bowels of tender love and most kind compassion, that would for us endure to be so entreated.⁶⁸

Most often Andrewes utilizes the representations provided by the text itself, where he skillfully binds image and text through imagination and ingenuity. The 1620 Resurrection sermon serves as a landmark in this way. Its chief virtue lies in the way he focuses the entire sermon upon Mary's character. Throughout the homily he personifies Mary's love through ten different postures: "love that stands still"; "love running down the cheeks"; and "love that never thinks it has looked enough, so it looks again," etc.

⁶⁷ Trevor A. Owen, 69

⁶⁸ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 132.

While presenting the last two examples Mary mistakes the risen Christ for a gardener, an image upon which Andrewes develops a series of profound theological truths. Andrewes suggests,

For in a sense, and a good sense, Christ may well be said to be a gardener, and indeed is one. A gardener He is then. The first, the fairest garden that ever was, Paradise, He was the gardener, it was of His planting. So, a gardener.

And ever since it is He That as God makes all our gardens green, sends us yearly the spring, and all the herbs and flowers we then gather; and neither Paul with his planting, nor Apollos with his watering, could do any good without Him. So a gardener in that sense.

But not that alone; but He it is that gardens our “souls” too, and makes them as the Prophet saith, “like a well-watered garden;” weeds out of them whatsoever is noisome or unsavory, sows and plants them with true roots and seeds of righteousness, waters them with the dew of Hi grace, and makes them bring forth fruit to eternal life.⁶⁹

Devoted to words and the one Word incarnate, Andrewes is relentless in moving the listener toward Christ as the hub of reality. On the occasion of his 1606 Nativity sermon he proposed, “In Immanuel, all the promises of God are as lines drawn from the center, all in Him, yea and Amen.”⁷⁰ Such convergence is demonstrated frequently through his use of typology, a design that makes correspondence between Christ’s life and the persons, events, and things of the Old Testament,⁷¹ and thus serves to bring continuity in the scheme of salvation for the listener. In the 1597 homily based on Zechariah 12:10, Andrewes develops such a pattern to connect Christ with the Old Testament text, “*And they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced.*”

Which term of piercing we shall the more clearly conceive, if with the ancient writers, we sort it with the beginning of Psalm 22, the Psalm of the Passion. For, in the very front or inscription of the Psalm, our Saviour Christ is compared *cervo*

⁶⁹ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 15-16.

⁷⁰ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol 1, 20.

⁷¹ Joseph Galdon, *Typology and Seventeenth-Century Literature*, (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1975) 14.

matutino, “to the morning hart;” that is, a hart roused early in the morning, as from His very birth He was by Herod, hunted and chased all his life long, and this day brought to his end, and, as the poor deer, stricken and pierced through side, heart, and all; which is it we are here willed to behold.⁷²

In other places, he labors in subtlety to juxtapose the Old Testament with the New Testament: thus we have the star out of Jacob in Num. 24:17 for the Orietur stella of the Magi⁷³, the brazen serpent from Num 21:8 as Christ raised up on a cross⁷⁴, and the body between the two Angels as the true Ark of God.⁷⁵

2. With the Incarnation at the core Anglican theology, Lancelot Andrewes most often seizes the opportunity to inject “God with us” into the story of needy humanity. “Behold, Adam would have become ‘one of Us’ – the fault; behold, ‘one of Us’ will become Adam, is the satisfaction.”⁷⁶ Often with great imagination, he unfurls the doctrine of the Incarnation from its primary occasion, yet along the lines of time and space he ranges forwards and backwards, from Nativity to Crucifixion, from the beginning of time to the exaltation at the right hand of the Father, between Old and New Testaments.

Most impressive is Andrewes’s extraordinary regard for the listener in every sermon, forever appealing to the conscience, and gently moving his audience into the moral dimension of the text. This consideration, an important quality in the homiletic of any generation, seeks to include the preacher in the process of repentance, reorientation, and the necessary reordering of habits, to which the Gospel calls all who hear it. The Good Friday sermon of 1597 demonstrates Andrewes’s unwillingness to preach “at the crowd,” as though “they” alone and not he, as well, were responsible for Christ’s death.

Our manner is, either to lay it on the soldiers, that were the instruments; or if not upon them, upon Pilate the judge that gave sentence; or if not upon him, upon the people that importuned the judge. But the Prophet here indicted others. For by saying, “They shall look,” and “Whom they have pierced,” he intendeth by very construction, that the first and second “they,” are not two, but one and the same

⁷² *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 120.

⁷³ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. 1, 254

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁵ G. M. Story, 201.

⁷⁶ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. 1, 22.

parties. “He laid upon Him the transgressions of *us all*,” so that it was the sin of *our polluted hands* that pierced His hands, the swiftness of *our feet* to do evil that nailed His feet, the wicked devices of *our heads* that gored His head, and the wretched desires of *our hearts* that pierced His heart. We that “look upon,” it is we that pierced Him.”⁷⁷

Andrewes exhibits a unique understanding of people in his appeal, recognizing that most of us do not make important changes in our description of the world abruptly. Walter Brueggemann, in his discussion of evangelical preaching in the context of our new culture, suggests that most of us who hear preaching today will not embrace an alternative that is given us in a coercive way. Such force in general causes us to become defensive. He seems to preach well aware of the listener’s need to linger in the process of being moved from conflict toward resolution. This distance leaves room for one to notice dissonance between his experience and the text, and wonder if there is a dimension to it all that has been missed.⁷⁸ Notice how Andrewes strikes the balance of patience and response in this humorous section from the famed Nativity Sermon XV, where he contrasts the listeners’ responsiveness to that of the Magi.

With them it was *vidimus, venimus* [we have seen; we have come]: With us it would have been *veniemus* [we will come] at most. Our fashion is to see and see again before we stir a foot, specially if it be the worship of Christ. Come such a journey at such a time? No; but fairly have put it off to the spring of the year, till the days longer, and the ways fairer, and the weather warmer, till better traveling to Christ. But then, for the distance, desolateness, tediousness, and the rest, any of them were enough to mar our *venimus* quite. It must be no great way, first, we must come; we love not that. We fare the shepherds, yet they came but hard by; rather like them than the Magi. Nay, not like them neither. For with us the nearer, lightly the farther off; our proverb is you know, “The nearer the Church, the farther from God.”

But when we do it, we must be allowed leisure. Ever *veniemus*, never *venimus*; ever coming, never come. We love to make no great haste. To other things perhaps; not to *adorare*, the place of the worship of God. Why should we? Christ

⁷⁷ Ibid., 125-126.

⁷⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 29.

is no wild-cat. Best get us a new Christmas in September; we are not like to come to Christ at this feast.⁷⁹

Therein lies the brilliance of Lancelot Andrewes as he forever works to stay linked with the listener. In his Pentecost sermon of 1608 he stresses the importance of preaching, comparing it to the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, defining his craft as “the taking of the spirit of the preacher, and putting it on the hearer; or to express it by the type of fire, the lighting of one torch by another, so that it might pass from man to man, till all were lightened.”⁸⁰ Though removed from his actual preaching by centuries, hearing only as I have read, I am confident that something of Andrewes has been passed on to me in the studies of the past few months. His sermons require great attention to detail, sometimes thick in the language of his day, yet his desire to bring to life the text through imagery and his care to bring the listener along, are useful guides for preaching to the culture in which I live and serve. I am grateful and expectant that his ministry will reach into my own, in preaching to the men and women of the Navy and Marine Corps. It is to that audience that I now move in this discussion.

⁷⁹ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 258.

CHAPTER THREE

What In the World is Going On?

Someone once said that when you invite an amateur to speak, his first question is usually, “What will I talk about?” If you ask a professional to speak, her question is “How large is my audience?” The most important single factor in whether or not you are an effective communicator lies in whether or not you pursue a third question: “Who are my listeners?” For some reason though, many of us who are called to teach and preach are fixated on the “what,” and often lose sight of the people in the pew.

⁸⁰ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 130-131.

Let's face it. We don't teach the Bible. "We teach *people* the Bible. As vital as it is to know content, it's not enough. We must know our audience."⁸¹ Christian communicators who want to know their audience must be aware of the culture that shapes them, motivates them, and often lures them away from God. Preachers must not only think only on the message, but also on the nature of the hearers. Changing times elicit the question, "Is the message of Christ being heard, not just preached?"

If we as Navy chaplains fail to understand our listeners, and thus fail to perceive the significant ideological shifts affecting our community, we may wake up one day to realize that we are merely talking to ourselves about matters that only the deeply committed comprehend. As authors Clyde Fant and William Pinson Jr. observe in their thirteen-volume anthology *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*: the great sermons of the past lacked sparkle and punch today because they were written for another generation ...Great preaching is relevant preaching."⁸²

A decade ago, theologian Diogenes Allen forecast that our intellectual culture was at a major turning point. "A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages. The foundations of the modern world are collapsing, and we are entering a post-modern world."⁸³ In a nutshell, this ideology emerged to say: Give up on the idea of truth, have an experience instead. All you can believe is what is in your heart. Science and technology did not satisfy the issues of the heart. Modernity had failed to deal adequately

⁸¹ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2001) 7.

⁸² Clyde Fant and William Pinson Jr., *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, (Waco, Texas: Word, 1971).

⁸³ Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville : Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) 2.

deal with one basic question: “Tell me who I am?” Eventually a postmodern ethos surfaced that could be summed up from the words of the rock group Talking Heads’ song “Road to Nowhere”: “Well we don’t know where we’re going and we don’t know where we’ve been.” To which, their entire generation might like to add, “and we don’t *like* where we’ve been either.”⁸⁴

The problem is that many who minister to the people of the postmodern culture have not decided whether to engage with this changing world, or run the other direction! “The transition from the modern era to a postmodern era poses a grave challenge to the church in its mission to its own generation,” acknowledges Stanley Grenz. “Confronted by this new context, we dare not fall into the trap of wistfully longing for a return to the early modernity that gave evangelicalism its birth, for we are called to minister not to the past but to the contemporary context, and our contemporary context is influenced by postmodern ideas.”⁸⁵ It would be tragic if chaplains were the last defenders of the “old order.” We have been given an incredible opportunity to shape and impact another generation. But to reach the women and men of the sea services in our day, we must set ourselves to the task of interpreting the implications of postmodernism for the gospel and more specifically for the preaching of the gospel. In the following section, I will set out to identify four aspects of the prominent ideology of today’s culture. And then as the “men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (I Chron. 12:32), I will try to address homiletic strategies that effectively engage the people of this age.

⁸⁴ Graham Johnston, 27.

⁸⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 22.

“Whatever!”

Even television’s Bart Simpson understands today’s society, which maintains that a person can really only say, “according to my perception this is true.” He is often heard repeating popular ad slogans about the ambiguous, such as “Is it live or is it Memorex?” or “Maybe it’s real, maybe it’s Maybelline.” You can hear Bart Simpson in the conversations on the “deckplate” as well, in what has become in this day a common response to any difficult question - “Whatever!?!*” “Whatever” is more than a faddish answer from an uncaring sailor. It is an attitude of the times that says life can offer too many choices, none of which represents an ideal option. The truth of the matter, says Bart and postmodernism, is that truth is up for grabs. Its determination is purely subjective. So that a world of multiple truths, multiple possibilities without guidance in choosing among them leads us down the road of personal preferences. In this regard, reality is not so much found as created by the individual. What is true is what one perceives to be true or wants to be true.

There is story about a group of umpires who got together and compared notes on how they decided to call a strike or a ball. The first umpire said, “I call them as they are.” The second umpire disagreed and said, “I call them as I see them.” The third umpire told the other two, “You are both wrong; they ain’t nothing until I call them.” And so the strike zone slid down.⁸⁶

Baseball’s shifting strike zone is analogous to a major paradigm shift occurring in society. This shift may be likened to the three umpires. The first umpire represents the old order, where truth exists and can be known. His calls correspond to the reality of

⁸⁶ Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990) 75.

what is. The second and third umpires represent postmodernist positions – the second being mainstream and the third more radical. The second admits that his view of the strike zone will vary from situation to situation, depending on how he is feeling. And the third umpire officiates in what might be termed virtual reality. Truth is only a construct of the individual; it is what we make it or want it to be.⁸⁷ So, to the question posed, “Is it live or is it Memorex?” the reply comes, “What’s the difference?” Reality isn’t about what is there, but what each person perceives to be there.

Jimmy Long in his book, *Generating Hope*, suggests that this deconstructing of truth is epitomized in MTV. The images in any given video are constantly changing and moving to redefine reality. Taken together, the images suggest that there is no objective reality – only preferences. Few of the videos offer any linear or composite narrative. Most will bombard the viewer with a rapid succession of images that have little connection to each other.⁸⁸ In other words there is no grand scheme or plan to life. We are left with fleeting images, and it is up to us to determine the ones that fit for us.

You can see where this leads us in regard to biblical preaching. In the present culture the authority of the Bible is brought into question. “At best the postmodern outlook places the Bible on equal footing with other sacred books like the Koran, the Vedas, the Talmud, and even less-respected writing.” He goes on to say, “Likewise, even those who do accept the Bible as carrying unique authority might also say, ‘That’s your interpretation, not mine!’”⁸⁹ Furthermore, postmodernity is suspicious of anyone who claims to possess the truth or reality, which makes the preacher of the Bible suspect. Walter Truett Anderson likens this to the lesson from the *Wizard of Oz*: “After a long

⁸⁷ Graham Johnston, 30.

⁸⁸ Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 70.

journey in search of the great Oz, Dorothy and her friends finally reach his palace where they are ushered into the throne room and finally into the wizard's mighty presence. Lights flash, and a great voice thunders. Dorothy's friends are suitably terrified and impressed, until Dorothy's dog Toto pulls away the curtain to reveal that behind the awe-inspiring machinery is nothing but an ordinary human being. The wizard is seen at last."⁹⁰

Postmodernism has pulled the curtains back on anyone who claims to have answers or extraordinary insight, and will quickly dismiss him as an ordinary person who is selfishly deceptive or just playing games.⁹¹ Perhaps more fundamental to the issue of biblical preaching is that the "whatever culture" resists the "big story," the all-encompassing overview that seeks to make connections and answer the critical questions about human existence. The sermon is just another possibility. And so the Bible is likened to one flashing image of many sacred images, not large enough or open enough in itself to contain all the experiences and realities of all people. Today only 28% of Americans believe in "absolutes" so that the distinctions between right and wrong or good and bad have lost their relevancy.⁹² The authority to derive meaning lies in the hands of each individual; *authority is from within, not without*. The listener then tends to perceive the preacher as voicing a personal opinion, "seeing what he wants to see," in order to authenticate his own experience.

For the preacher who understands that the Bible itself has many voices and views of reality, a sermon can be a platform which presents biblical possibilities rather than

⁸⁹ Graham Johnston, 30

⁹⁰ Walter Truett Anderson, 29.

⁹¹ Graham Johnston, 31.

⁹² David Wells, *No Place For Truth*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993) 286.

absolutes. This kind of preaching has the potential of allowing the listener to reserve judgment upon the Bible in order to give the biblical message a hearing. Johnston asserts that in a postmodern framework, Christianity holds no special claim to be heard over competing beliefs. It is a way, but not the only way.⁹³ The mindset parallels what Paul encountered on Mars Hill in Acts 17. At the time, Christianity was “the new possibility on the block,” yet the apostle Paul was given a fair hearing: “You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears and we want to know what they mean” (Acts 17: 20).

“Get Real!”

As the “whatever culture” takes root, there emerges a new insistence which characterizes today’s generation of young men and women: “Get Real!” As the ties with science and reason have been unraveled with the passing of modernity, this demand requires that all the possibilities of reality be transported through the medium of our senses. The Nike shoe company tapped into this attitude when it targeted the Generation X audience, and adopted the motto, “Just do it!” To which we might add, “If it feels right.” Today’s way of living and learning through the senses has created the “near” world of virtual reality. And given that our senses perceive the world differently, each individual’s view of life will be unique. Unfortunately, many of us have failed to notice, or in some cases refuse this switch in the way our military service members engage the world. We’re still talking to them in a language that does not resonate, preaching to them in a way that does not “make sense.” Their eyes and ears have been retrained to fix upon sights and sounds. The title of Walter Truett Anderson’s work on postmodernity states the obvious for the Navy chaplain, “Reality isn’t what it used to be.”

⁹³ Graham Johnston, 35.

Walter Ong, author of *The Presence of the Word*, suggests in his studies that our senses are conditioned and influenced by the period of time in which we live and the cultures of which we are a part. Of particular interest to Ong is the “sensorium,” the term he uses to characterize how the senses are organized at a particular time in history. The most significant development of the sensorium in recent years is the electronic culture, which is rapidly replacing our literate world as the preferred medium of communication. This electronic culture prefers to transmit images via sound and visualization.⁹⁴

“Consider it a trade of Gutenberg for Spielberg,” says Graham Johnston. In the modern world the printed word ruled. In fact, *Time* magazine named Gutenberg the “person of the last Millennium” for inventing the printing press, and paving the way for the Enlightenment – a movement of ideas grounded in the written word. In the same way, the advent of television ushered in the postmodern age, where *Life* magazine named the master image-maker and storyteller, Steven Spielberg as the baby boomer generation’s most influential person.⁹⁵ And though it would be silly to think that we would ever totally abandon communication through words, we must wonder if our words in preaching work to contain effective images.

The nature of an image is such that it leaves the viewer and the listener not with carefully crafted ideas and principles, but with impressions that allow one to construct his or her own interpretation and meaning. Yet the image itself may be carefully crafted, based on a clear idea. This presents an incredible challenge to the preacher because the image in this case is not verbally expressed. Communications professor Kathleen Jamieson asserts that television in this regard, has created a whole new language with its

⁹⁴ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967) 3-7.

privileged visual argument. Now politicians don't have to argue the old way, with evidence ... they telegraph with pictures. "When juxtaposed, she says, pictures can create things that didn't actually happen in the real world."⁹⁶ And to that we must add, pictures also have the power to create what did happen in the real world. Many caregivers find it difficult to engage here, for this new world of imagery often blurs the boundaries, mixes fact with fiction, and confuses the real with the simulated.⁹⁷

This jumble contained within an image has captivated the imaginations of our young service men and women. A movie like the futuristic *Blade Runner* mesmerizes the postmodern viewer because it portrays the world as inhabited by synthetic humans created in the laboratory. These "replicants" who coexist with people are virtually indistinguishable from those born and raised as humans. Such a film also serves to uncover the moral confusion of our age which might ask, "Who is to say that 'reality' is any less real, since what people call reality is merely a social construct anyway?" With senses in charge and boundaries indistinct, the culture has produced a hodgepodge of beliefs, morals, and ethics to accompany its world of fluid imagery.

In the Western world, modern people applied reason as a gauge to ethical behavior – and the Bible was accepted in principle, if not in conduct. But in a postmodern society multiple standards of morality apply and situation ethics prevail. Morality, like belief, becomes a matter of "what works for me." So the issue of Christianity isn't so much whether it happened, but whether one views its beliefs as desirable. The typical postmodernist will ask "Why?" "Why would I want to remain

⁹⁵ Graham Johnston, 48.

⁹⁶ Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1991) 226. Cited in Johnston, 49.

⁹⁷ Jimmy Long, 73.

faithful to my spouse while shipped away?” “Why should I be honest with my supervisor.” Those kinds of questions make it increasingly apparent that we do not live in an immoral society – one in which right and wrong is clearly understood and wrong behavior is chosen. We live in an amoral society – one in which right and wrong are categories with no universal meaning, and everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes.⁹⁸

This kind of shift may be frightening to the preacher who has a view of reality that seeks to protect the non-negotiable, authoritative quality of the Bible. The good news is that living Word of God does not have to be compromised in order to satisfy a relevant presentation of its voices and views in ways which appeal to the senses and the heart of today’s culture. The Bible contains the necessary images, yet it leaves room as to how they are communicated. And in light of the fact that postmodern people won’t hesitate to make choices inconsistent with a prescribed set of values, biblical preaching reaches beyond pointing out the moral way, but also establishes why one should care about morality in the first place. It is not a matter of telling people how it is or setting people straight. To the contrary, our men of women of the Sea Services are seeking an experienced and patient guide that will lead them through the intricacies of life.

“Life Sucks”

A few years ago, a “twenty-something” guitar-playing misfit found his way into our military congregation. We’ll call him John. John was a real character; rough around the edges, a drifter disconnected from family and friends, but he could make his guitar

⁹⁸ Tim Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” *Leadership* (Winter 1996): 112. Cited in Graham Johnston, 41.

sing like a canary! It didn't take long for us to discover that John was more interested in playing his electric Fender in our worship service praise band than he was in sitting through an entire service with preachers, prayers, and offering plates. After some consideration, we decided to let John join the band in an effort to build a bridge of relationship with him. On one particular Sunday I preached a sermon on the gift of family which struck a sensitive nerve with John. And before I could finish the last few lines of my homily, he stood up to announce in a booming voice, "You know what, Brent? Life sucks." After every head in the place turned to see this fellow standing in the middle of the crowd, he railed on. "I've asked God for a long time to give me a wife, the kind of woman you're talking about. And He hasn't come through yet! I don't think there's any hope for me." Such is the mindset of our present culture – "life sucks" – there is no hope for me.

John clearly demonstrates that another noticeable shift has occurred in our day, moving our society from a sense of human progress to one of human misery. Where modernity reveled in reason and the human ability to overcome, postmodernity wallows in the incapacity to know with any certainty both what is true, and therefore the inability to answer life's great questions.⁹⁹ Instead of optimism, there is now suspicion and mistrust. Instead of hope there is insecurity and instability. The television shows of the modern age reveal the change. Previous generations grew up on *Leave It To Beaver's* "Wally and the Beav," or with "John Boy" of *The Waltons*, each brimming with goodness and hope. Now the airways are inundated with shows that promote losers without a clue. One can view them weekly in the leading families of *The Simpsons*, the Castanzas of *Seinfeld*, and the Bundys of *Married with Children*. With shows like these at the top of

the viewing hit list, it is apparent that our culture has lost its certainty, and replaced it with a skepticism and cynicism about life, each other, and the future.

Modernity once proudly boasted of changing the world and solving all of our human ills through technological advancement and human progress. The H-bomb changed that perception. The AIDS epidemic has forced our hand. Perpetual progress is a delusion and failure, so that vulnerability and fear permeate today's service men and women. "911" is not a number merely associated with help in times of trouble, but a reminder to most Americans that we are not exempt from pain and calamity. The film *Apollo 13* vividly parallels this sentiment. Three stranded American marooned astronauts must rely on their human know-how to escape a cold death in space and get themselves back to earth. With a crippled spacecraft floating aimlessly in orbit, they must find their own way home. Postmodernity presents the same dilemma: we are left to our own devices, and we are miserable doing so.

Professor Chet Lesnick, who teaches at Colby College in Maine, conducts a yearly survey that asks each student to describe a personal problem. Over 90 percent identify stress as their number one problem. Many are particularly vulnerable to stress because they lack any type of absolute moorings. They live in a state of fluidity, which contributes to a sense that they have been cast adrift. David Cannon, a generational researcher, claims this stress is a result of a wall that young people have built around themselves. He states, "No other generation in the past has had so many vivid images brought to them by the brutality of the world. They have lived through bitter divorces

⁹⁹ Graham Johnston, 27.

that left them feeling abandoned. They've built walls because they are hurt and fearful human beings.”¹⁰⁰

Some in this culture will deal with their pain through means of escape to the good times. Postmodernity could easily have produced a society that conceded to despair and determined that life is not worth living. The rise in teenage suicide in the Western world is a testament to that sentiment. However, most under our care choose to live life on the edge. I can hear it in the sailors who walk off the ship for a few days of liberty: “Since the ride of life is headed down a dead-end-road, one might as well sit back and enjoy the scenery.” David Cook in *Blind Alley Beliefs* characterizes the culture well: “We want to have fun. We want the good things in life and we want them here and now. Our needs are at the center of our existence.”¹⁰¹ Others will alienate themselves; deprive themselves of relationship because relationships have been a source of tremendous pain. A mistrust of people who have caused hurt through past experiences of abandonment or rejection will result in isolation. This intense aloneness exists in the middle of a crowd or in a busy life consumed by the pursuit of the good life. This generation is full of pain, having a good time, still in pain and searching for another framework upon which to build their lives.

Cook goes on to write, “The only reality for this generation is the perpetual present. The only world is today – now. Time is just a series of ‘now’ events that have no order or meaning. They are essentially chaotic.”¹⁰² Lacking a common thread to hold them together, my sense is that most in our military community are groping around in the

¹⁰⁰ Quote from Rebecca Haus, “Introducing Those of Generation X,” *The Boston Globe*, December 29, 1991. pp. 1, 16. Cited in Jimmy Long, 48.

¹⁰¹ David Cook, *Blind Alley Beliefs*, (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 13.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24.

dark. The major problem for them is meaninglessness. Years ago Paul Tillich argued that in early centuries of the church, the urgent problem was *death*. Given an average ancient lifespan of less than thirty years, Tillich was surely correct. In medieval years the problem became *guilt*: How can we stand acquitted before the judgment of God? The Church responded by emphasizing penitential rites and preaching that focused upon atonement and forgiveness. People still die and people still struggle with guilt, but now, according to Tillich, the overriding concern is *meaninglessness*.¹⁰³

A simple reminder for all of us who are caregivers in the Navy: Ministry in the military is a vocation of meaning. We are not only helping to define life for a culture that has no definitions or absolutes, but are also transmitting hope to a generation filled with pain, void of answers. Preaching biblically is one way of speaking meaning in a culture of misery. Alister McGrath states, “[People] do not feel secure in the world. This awareness of an absence of security is itself a powerful stimulus to look for some ground of assurance ... The preacher has the task of correlating the gospel with this sense of profound unease, interpreting it and fulfilling it with the presence of the living God.”¹⁰⁴ In such a short time, the young people under our care have experienced much harm. Their tough veneer only hides a deep-seated fear, a longing for something meaningful and profound. Biblical preaching must “hold out the word of life” (Phil. 2:16) as an offering of hope to the hopeless.

“I Belong Therefore I Am!”

¹⁰³ David Buttrick, *Speaking Parables*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000) xiv.

¹⁰⁴ Alister McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 70.

If anyone captured the spirit of the premodern period in just a few words, it was Anselm who said, “I believe in order that I may understand.” Revelation and faith were the building blocks of understanding for centuries, and so the motto fit. Descartes, on the other hand, spoke from the ideas of the new modernity in a different philosophy, “I think therefore I am.” In his culture, divine revelation was overcome by human reason, so that people were quick to search for certainty within. No doubt, the postmodern period of today offers a new generational identity. Since our society no longer looks to find its center in objective truth, it is moving toward a focus on community. Jimmy Long recommends an ideology apropos for this era, “I belong, therefore I am.” The world is no longer a place where meaning is found in autonomy. So the postmodern culture looks for meaning within the risk of relationships.¹⁰⁵

Survivors, a recent rage in postmodern television, demonstrates this shift. The show is composed of a group of sixteen strangers who are selected by the producers to live together for several weeks in a remote area of the world. Perfect strangers before the show begins, “the survivors” must form their own cooperative society or “tribe,” building shelter, gathering and catching food, and using their collective wits to make surviving in their rugged and primitive environment a little easier. Those who succeed in the day-to-day challenges will be rewarded to make life a little more bearable. In a period of six weeks, as the tribe lives and works together, the diverse people in the group become a community, the members of which share many more similar viewpoints than they did when they first came together. They have a new sense of truth that the “tribe” has helped to shape.

¹⁰⁵ Jimmy Long, 61.

The breakdown of the family has contributed largely to this longing for meaningful connections. Between 1960 and 1980, the American divorce rate tripled. By 1986 the United States had the highest divorce rate in the world. Consequently, fifty percent of today's teens are not living with both parents. It is difficult for the service men and women represented in these generations to have a sense of connection when their own families have little or no stability.¹⁰⁶ Gene Edward Veith observes, "Whereas traditional communities gave a sense of belonging and permanence, the contemporary social scene is characterized by impermanence."¹⁰⁷ A few years ago I surveyed a battalion of 800 Marines to which I was assigned, in order to learn the primary reasons for which young men and women come into the military. Some joined the Corps because they needed employment; others because of the educational benefits afforded them by the military. But the majority enlisted to find a sense of family. Fifty percent reported they were searching for someone or something that they did not have at home.

Contributing to the pursuit of community is technology's development, according to John Nesbitt's forecasts in his best seller *Megatrends*. He called the phenomenon "high tech/high touch,"¹⁰⁸ explaining that increased use of technology would lead people to seek more human connection. The touch of the computer keyboard or the television's

¹⁰⁶ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991. Strauss and Howe define certain boundaries based on generational theory. These authors unify fifteen strands of generational theory into a useful typology for those who work with specific age groups. The most current categories described in their book are as follows: **G. I. Generation** //born 1901-1924; **Silent Generation**//born 1925-1942; **Boom Generation** (Boomers)// born 1943-1960; **Thirteenth Generation (Generation X)** // born 1961-1981; **Millennial Generation**// born 1982 and later. On the average, a generation emerges every two decades, with boundaries determined by watershed events and wars. A generation consists of people born within a particular time span, who experience similar shaping forces during their childhood or youth. Generations have a group personality that alternates through successive generations The study of generational style focuses upon the immediate consequences of societal change, a snapshot of change within a twenty-year period. Cited by Captain John Zimmerman, "Preaching to the Shadow Generation." A paper presented to the Navy Chief of Chaplains: 1730 Ser 971M/0685: Aug 5, 1992.

¹⁰⁷ Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times*, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1994) 86.

remote control will never satisfy the deep need for relationship. James Iliffe observes: “The authenticity of relationships and the integrity of community hold a powerful attraction for a new generation of young people struggling to find something lasting in today’s throwaway culture – something precious in the midst of a society that feeds on trash and greed.”¹⁰⁹

During a deployment to the Persian Gulf aboard the aircraft carrier USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, the naval aviators I served with met at the end of every exhausting day to enjoy a video together in the squadron “ready room.” Some of the same movies were watched dozens of times in the course of the six-month deployment, but the nightly “roll-ems” were a ritual protected at all costs. Fundamental to our military culture, and society at large is a great need to belong and stay in touch. The singer/songwriter Sting resonates with this idea in one of his “postmodern tunes,” “You could say I’ve lost my belief in science. You could say I’ve lost my faith in the Holy Church. But if I ever lose my faith in you, there’d be nothing left for me to lose.”

An interesting dynamic merges the possibilities and preferences of the postmodern era with the longing for community. The community itself decides what is true. Only those within the community or “tribe” have the right to comment on or criticize their truth. Chaplains quickly learn of this trend when they attempt to care for, and speak in the lives of any given group to which they are assigned, without first building bridges of identification. Try taking care of Marines without putting yourself into their world – wearing their uniform, enduring life in the field with them, and

¹⁰⁸ John Naisbitt. *Megatrends*. New York: Warner Books, 1982. Cited in Graham Johnston, 54.

¹⁰⁹ James Iliffe, “Searching for Reality in a Postmodern Age,” *On Being* (September 1996) 38.

believing in their unique spirit. There is nothing more disastrous, than to demand an audience, to challenge preferences, without first earning the trust of the tribe.

The consequence of community relativism is that it divides people into conflicting groups where individuals are lost to the power and control of the group.¹¹⁰ With the formation of this new tribalism in our own country, we witness this fragmentation as issue after issue causes us to split into our different groups. So that from the personal character of our President to the war in Afghanistan, from abortion to stem cell research, issues divide and fragment. Relationships are difficult to maintain when the fabric of our familial and national identity is often torn.

Biblical preaching that connects with the listener to encourage connections with the Christian community has the potential of making a huge difference in a culture of division and homelessness. It is precisely when we experience life as exiles, displaced and uprooted, that preaching speaks most eloquently to the idea of being at home in a secure creation. When differences and conflict break us apart, the Bible invites us into a family where differences and distinctions are deferred to the greater purpose of Christian love. So perhaps the preacher's response to the culture's hunger for meaningful relationships can be communicated in two goals. First, he communicates with an open and graceful attitude that makes the church a place a safe place for the process of spiritual searching and seeking. And at the same time, with the content of the Bible as a guide, she provides a vision and description of God's intent and purpose for "one another life."

CHAPTER FOUR

Preaching in a Postmodern World

So how does a preacher respond to the postmodern audience described above? How does she approach the task of engaging listeners immersed in loneliness and pain, grasping for reality through the possibilities of their senses and the barrage of images that

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 71.

come their way? Such a challenge must be met with a paradigm of preaching which understands the distinct nature of the culture, seeks to connect with its listeners, and yet maintains a biblical focus that offers something of spiritual significance and value. The following preaching goals, reflective in part the homiletic goals gleaned from the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, will guide the preacher who labors in such a generation.

Shapes a Sense of Community in Faith

While studying at Duke, in the spring of 2002 I attended a lecture given by Richard Lischer, Professor of Homiletics and author of *The Preacher King*, a book which highlights the life and preaching ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. During his presentation, Dr. Lischer outlined the major features of King's homiletic which contributed to his widely recognized effectiveness as a communicator. Lischer first noted that King preached with *elevation*, he lifted others up toward the noble purposes of God. Additionally, he communicated with a strong sense of *identification*. He spoke the language of the listener, connecting with them through shared life experiences. In the latter part of his ministry, King became a *prophetic* preacher, continually falling back on what God says about issues of life and society at large. He was bold to point out the differences between the Bible's teaching and society's failings. The next day I saw Dr. Lischer and we talked about King's preaching feature as a possible homiletic model. During our conversation he remarked, "I think I would add a fourth trait to make the model more complete." "What's that?" I asked. "A biblical preacher also preaches in the context of *association*." Lischer suggested, "Preaching is performed in the framework of a spiritual community, where there is family of relationships and a circle of

accountability to carry out and construct the sermon's intent."¹¹¹ In other words, preachers labor in a context so that their sermons have a focus and a purpose to perform within and for a particular community of Christians.

As I stated in the earlier pages of this piece, today's postmodern generation yearns to belong to such a community. Generation X-ers, as a result of familial brokenness and loneliness are searching for meaning within the risks of relationships, and many are finding their way into the Church to satisfy such a hunger. In any case, the preacher guides and facilitates entry into the community by virtue of his or her participation and leadership there. More specifically, she has a critical role in creating an environment which communicates belonging to the postmodern listener, not only through the attitude projected in her preaching, but in the content of her sermons as well.

The Preaching Attitude that Shapes Community: When the message of grace is proclaimed, no one can claim superiority before God and no one is excluded from the invitation into God's presence. This understanding of grace is encouraged through language and attitude. A graceful approach to biblical preaching does not prevent the preacher from handling and expounding upon the Scriptures with confidence and authority. However, one must remember that in the postmodern listener's mind, the Bible is no more than another possibility. The Bible initially seems to be one of many sources offered in the smorgasbord of life! So it takes time for the listener to engage. "The effort to know the truth involves struggle, groping, feeling one's way," Leslie Newbigin contends. "It is true that there are also moments of sudden illumination, but

¹¹¹ Richard Lischer. A lecture given at Duke University, Rhetoric of Preaching, April 2, 2002, taken from *The Preacher King*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

these come only to those who have accepted the discipline of patient groping, of trying out different possibilities, of sustained reflection.”¹¹²

The preacher’s role in this regard is more than laying out the truth, but it is assisting in the listener’s struggle to find truth in his or her life. Elizabeth Achtemeier offers four questions that will help us to understand such a struggle, and further bridge the gap between the biblical text and the postmodern listener in the pew:

1. **“What would my people doubt to be true in this text?”** If listeners hear something read or stated that conflicts with their accepted view or reality without any explanation, listeners will conclude that you don’t live in the same world that they do.
2. **“What do my people need to know or be reminded of in this text?”**
3. **“With what inner feelings, longings, thoughts, and desires of my people does this text connect?”** Questions two and three force the speaker to think about where the text touches the lives of listeners.
4. **“If this text is true, what kind of world do we live in?”** In taking time to address underlying ideas of the text, the preacher gives listeners the information they need to process ideas on their own rather than accept ideas blindly; this conveys a respect for listeners who might not share a Christian worldview.¹¹³

When preachers are committed to the process of allowing their listeners to search the Bible for themselves, then people are given the reassurance both verbally and nonverbally that they can suspend judgment on belief while being free to investigate it. Dogma is deferred, inquiry is invited, and mistakes are allowed when the preacher speaks and leads in grace. The effective preacher gives room and space for one to make a journey. I have already suggested in a previous section that just as it is impossible to see something pressed too closely to our eyes, so it is impossible for us to believe something pressed too forcefully into our minds and hearts. Preaching in this way is more conversation than lecture.

¹¹² Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) Cited in Johnston, 91.

One of the ways to create such room and freedom: ask questions of the listener rather than make declarations to them. Lancelot Andrewes modeled this in his preaching of the sixteenth century. In his Good Friday sermon of 1604 he creates an openness of heart by probing the audience with a question raised from the text. Rather than imposing conclusions upon them, he inquires of the audience in such a way that probes the distance between their experience and the text: “Have you no regard, all you that pass by this way?” Or in modern vernacular, “What distracts you today?” “What is it that would keep you from getting something out of this message?” I’ve learned in preaching to sailors and Marines that they can take the challenge of tough spiritual questions, just as long as at the moment of truth we give them absolute freedom of choice.

Graham Johnston reminds us that in preaching to the current generation, Christian communicators should never forget “whence they came.” Biblical assumptions are often carried into the pulpit with our sermons and we forget that it took a process of discovery and dialogue with certain ideas in our own life before we accepted them as true.¹¹⁴ We step into the pulpit confident that something is true, and simply accept something at face value. On one occasion I was preaching a sermon in a Navy chapel, moving between two or three passages when one of the young sailors spoke up, “Sir, could you tell me where to find this book of *Acts* that you guys are reading from?” What one in the pew knows without thinking about it, there is another who has to fumble and stumble in order to find his or her way.

A postmodern audience requires a viable conversation partner in the preacher. So the Marine who demands that the world around them “Get Real,” may in turn say to the

¹¹³ Elizabeth Achtemeier cited in Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching*, 128.

¹¹⁴ Graham Johnston, 91.

preacher, “Be Real!” It is important that our preaching demonstrates that we too have wrestled with our faith to come to the conclusions we have. Our story of struggle told in humility and honesty goes a long way in proving our willingness to walk with our listeners in their journey. Additionally, the biblical assumptions most of us work with need to be unfurled from time to time, so the listener can understand the framework too, to see or hear the process by which we arrived at our conclusions of faith. Transparency in a preacher softens the resistance of a culture where there is a general fear or suspicion of someone who claims to have answers.

Lancelot Andrewes preached with such steady grace toward his listeners. He understood that doctrine, *if properly communicated*, touches the conscience and makes the listeners capable of response toward God.¹¹⁵ In the 1622 Nativity Sermon of the Magi, he exposed the difficulty of coming to Christ in faith, yet with a demand that was both modest and inclusive. Andrewes preached to himself as he preached to his audience.

They [the Magi] saw, they came; no sooner saw, but they set out presently. So as the first appearing of the star, as might be last night, they knew it was Baalam’s star; it called them away, they made ready straight to being their journey this morning ...they took all these pains, made all this haste that they might be there to worship Him.

Our fashion is to see and see again before we stir a foot, specially if it be to the worship of Christ. Come such a journey at such a time? No; but fairly have put it off to the spring of the year, till the days longer, and the ways fairer, and the weather warmer, till better traveling to Christ.... To find where He is, we must learn of these to ask where He is, which we full little set ourselves to do. If we stumble on Him, so it is; but for any asking we trouble not ourselves, but sit still as we say and let nature work; and so let grace too, and so for us it shall ...read it in the Psalm, “there is a generation of them that seek Him.” Of which these were, and of that generation let us be.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ellen F. Davis, 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 258-259.

Preaching requires such grace and openness in order to connect with the postmodern listener. Issues of a grittier nature, hard and tough issues of morality do not have to be avoided when the relationship with the hearer becomes more important than “being right.” For this reason the twenty-first century may signal a decline in the effectiveness of military chaplains who are an unknown quantity and lack a preexisting basis of trust with their people. Ministry of presence in the workplace, as well as the presence of a graceful attitude in the place of preaching will help us overcome such a problem. Richard Lischer’s point is well taken: effective preaching takes place where the preacher is in a patient and respectful relationship with his audience.

The Preaching Content Which Shapes Community: Where loyalty to an institution or denomination was once the accepted value for the pre-World War II generation, it is now the sense of community that functions as the glue which holds people together in a meaningful way. Both Generation X and the Millennial Generation crave relationships that deliver such meaning. The emerging culture has embraced the notion of friendship and community because it fills a painful void.

That is why *Friends* has endured for years as one of the most-watched TV shows in history. It is easily the most emulated show, with several other programs trying to use the same concept – a group of friends trying to make sense of life. The show’s popularity is due to the fact that these six friends (Chandler, Joey, Monica, Phoebe, Rachel, and Ross) have become a community of people who care for each other. They have become the family that they all lacked growing up, a common experience for many members of today’s Sea Services.

God created us to live in community. So the key theological concept for the preacher who labors to build a framework for ministry in the postmodern world is *biblical community*, where the vision for community is formed and fashioned from the Bible's direction. Such hunger for relationship provides today's preacher an opportunity to shape and encourage God's intent and purpose for the community life via the sermon. The content of the sermon then becomes as important in the development of biblical community as the graceful attitude of the preacher delivering the sermon. Jimmy Long's book, *Generating Hope*, provides a thorough and relevant theology of community from which I will extract a short sketch of useful preaching themes. These themes suggest a useful pattern, helpful in conveying the issue of biblical community to a generation that seeks to belong.¹¹⁷

Created for Community: From the very beginning (Gen.1:1-3) God as Father, Son, and Spirit were in community with one another. So that when humankind was created in God's image, distinct from the rest of creation, we were created to live in community with each other and with God. The relationship between God and Adam and Eve, as well as Adam and Eve's relationship with one another was a model of God's intent from the beginning. He not only desired a loving, fulfilling relationship with humanity, but desired that humans enjoy the same with one another. Thus, Genesis 2 demonstrates an important image for the postmodern individual: because God was present in the community, Adam and Eve were given the potential to find contentment in one another.

Brokenness in Community: Eventually, brokenness in relationship and community occurred as Adam and Eve sinned. Their rebellion estranged them from God

¹¹⁷ Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 81-211.

as well as from each other. They felt shame, so they built a wall between each other. They were also ashamed and afraid of God, so they tried to hide (Gen.3: 7-10) by running from the only one who could overcome their fear, brokenness, and hostility. Community was shattered, contention replaced contentment, and instead of sharing, shame distanced them from one another. The creation story, the intent of God for community from the beginning moves from the loneliness of Adam to the community between Adam and Eve and God to the loss of all community. Our story, the rest of human history, is a story of people who live in the tension of longing for, yet rebelling against biblical community.

Restored to Community: Although humankind rebelled against God in the past and continues to do so in the present, God seeks to restore humanity from brokenness. Genesis 12 establishes a pattern that God continues in our day: God initiates and we respond. This pattern begins with the biblical idea of covenant, which brings two or more people together in agreement. Biblical history is a history of God in covenant community with people. God's presence and initiative is what held the covenant together, a testimony of God's faithfulness and desire to have relationship with us. The stories of Abraham and the children of Israel released from Egyptian bondage are examples of God's faithfulness, important testimonies since many in this generation know of few people who have been faithful to them. We need to preach that God, unlike others in their lives has been, is, and will be faithful – even when we are not faithful to God.

Re-created in Community: A brand new community came into being when God sent His Son Jesus to live among people on earth. By sending Jesus to us, God continued to demonstrate faithfulness to the covenant and to fulfill a longing of His own, to be

present among the people created for relationship. His purpose in coming to earth was to re-create community with God and with one another, through the same kind of relationship that had been experienced between Adam and Eve and God in the beginning.

Through Jesus' life, He provided a vision for human community made with attitudes of belonging rather than brokenness. He conveyed that "to belong" is to preserve and enjoy relationship with selfless giving, love, and forgiveness. Jesus also became the means by which relationship was re-created with God. He accomplished this through his death on the cross, a punishment we deserved for our rebellion against community with God. His sacrifice broke down the barrier, it dissolved the shame that has existed between men and women and God since the first act of rebellion. Jesus serves as the door through which we experience community with God and others once more.

Reconciled to Community: The ministry of the church, the spiritual community which Christ created through His sacrificial death is a ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is to welcome back those who have been hiding from God, as well as those who have been wounded by others. In this way the spiritual community exists to provide a "homecoming" for those who are alienated from God and from each other. It is a safe place where people are given space and freedom, while working to dismantle the walls of protection and isolation that they have built around themselves. The postmodern attraction to the church is not church as a building, but church as a fellowship where relationships with God and with one another are at the heart of the community. As today's world becomes more and more fragmented, a biblical community of reconciliation is a powerful witness.

According to Stanley Hauerwas, “The Church’s most important social task is nothing less than to be a community capable of hearing the story of God we find in Scripture and living in a manner that is faithful to that story ... a community capable of forming people with virtues sufficient to witness to God as truth to the world.”¹¹⁸ For the postmodern generation, the spiritual community is a powerful testimony for the gospel. Our churches gather boldly with glad and sincere hearts as they do, yet as people who have experienced the tragedies and triumphs of community with God and one another. This environment, where real people with a future hope can express their faith and share the realities of their lives, has a strong attraction to the postmodern generation. The typical sailor looks for such a place to belong, where people are not full of answers, but of faith.

With that in mind I would suggest that one of the more effective things a preacher can do to build community, while emphasizing the biblical content of community, is to *let the community preach*. Its makes for a wonderful sermon. By placing such a “sermon” within the homily or at some choice place in the worship service, we can offer 3-5 minute testimony of God’s continued faithfulness among us. John Leisge, a young man from Denver provided such a testimony for our chapel congregation several years ago. He had spent time in jail, lost his job and family, and had come into our community through a caring couple who took John into their home as a place to heal. For several months they loved him, let the church community care for him, and in the process John began to shed the cloak of shame he had worn for so long. I decided John’s situation was one that could benefit others. So I asked him to share his story in brief, as a part of my sermon on forgiveness. When he stood to speak that day, he spoke with a genuineness

¹¹⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991) 1-3.

and honesty that pierced the heart. I remember his words well. “I lost everything that matters to me; my wife, my kids, my job. Someone cared enough to take me in, accept me, and show me God’s intention for my life. I want my family back. In the worst way I want my family back. But something needs to happen in me first. Before I can relate to my family, I need a relationship with God.” In such an example the biblical community was shaped by both the proclamation of the Word concerning forgiveness, and the example of the Word working and changing a person’s heart and mind.

Brings to Life the Text

In this day and age, where images capture the heart and mind through every conceivable format, the biblical preacher will need to know how to bring the text to life in a variety of ways. Frederick Buechner articulates the importance of such communication that enlivens and engages, rather than preaching which approaches the text with an old voice. He writes: “Take any English word, even the most commonplace, and try repeating it twenty times in a row – umbrella, let us say, umbrella, umbrella, umbrella – and by the time we have finished, umbrella will not be a word anymore. It will be a noise, an absurdity, stripped of all meaning.”¹¹⁹ Likewise, when we take the greatest and most meaningful words of the Christian faith and repeat them in the same way over and over again, it is difficult to pay attention to them.

Satisfaction with the way preaching communicated in the past may not breed contempt in today’s audience as much as it breeds inattention, especially when the world has been captivated by an electronic culture of short, creative bites of sound and sight.

¹¹⁹ Michael J. Hostetler, *Introducing the Sermon: The Art of Compelling Beginnings*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 52. Cited in Johnston, p.21.

The task is to engage people anew with a fresh voice, so that even in this age, the gospel will remain good news rather than yesterday's news. Tex Sample in his book, *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World* suggests that people are "wired" differently today because of the enormous changes brought about by technological development. This shift requires that we communicate in a "hybrid of images" which mixes language with visual and oral expression.¹²⁰ Therefore, one of the most important concerns in preaching to the young service man or woman is the **mixture of images used in order to bring to life the text.**

Words as Image: The change in the nature of an image is critical for the Navy chaplain who desires to make an impact through his or her preaching. With words still a vital part of the communication mix, we must forever work to carve out meaningful images transported in the words of our homily. The sermon that meets the need of the "sense driven" age of postmodernity moves not from idea to idea, but from image to image. It is bright word-pictures, not ideas, that express and evokes emotion. Remember, the question which drives the young man or woman in the twenty-first century is not "What do I know about this passage?" but rather, "How do I feel about it?"

As I argued in the previous chapter, Lancelot Andrewes was a master at producing an image. He squeezed out all the meaning he could from one word to create multiple word-pictures. In his Easter sermon of 1620, Andrewes spoke of Christ as a "Gardener" in four different ways: As one who planted the first garden made for fellowship; as one who tends the creation to provide and sustain us with our daily bread; and the Gardener of our soul who weeds, waters, sows and plants so that we might grow spiritually. And then he writes:

¹²⁰ Tex Sample, *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 26.

But it is none of all these, but besides all of these, nay over and above all these, this day, if ever more properly, a gardener. Christ rising was indeed a gardener, and that a strange one, Who made such an herb grow out of the ground this day as the like as was never seen before, a dead body to shoot forth alive out of the grave. That by virtue of this morning's act shall garden our bodies too, turn all our graves into garden plots; yea shall one day turn land and sea and all into a great garden, and so husband them as they shall in due time bring forth live bodies, even all our bodies alive again.¹²¹

Such images, which are simple and understandable, can be deployed not as “points” to the sermon, but as possibilities in how people relate differently to God at any given time. Images in that regard move in and out of the text without the restriction of order or linear development.

He also worked at rhyming words, as in his paraphrase of the angel's reassuring message to the frightened shepherds, “your terror grows out of your error.”¹²² In the same sentence he would bring together words of similar sounds in order to emphasize differences as in his condemnation of the religious hypocrites, “It was not their double-fast, but their double face,”¹²³ or “He that cometh here in clouts, He will come in the clouds one day.”¹²⁴ Andrewes even liked to make up words, as he did calling Christ's death a “satis-passion.”¹²⁵ Play with word sound and sense has the same character of the slogans and rhymes one finds in advertising products to the postmodern culture. These carefully selected and compact words produce an image that sound like something you would read on a T-shirt!

We might also uncover benefit from Andrewes's example of using the short phrase, a mirror of the short bites of words and sounds that resonate with punch and

¹²¹ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 16.

¹²² *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 68.

¹²³ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 383.

¹²⁴ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 200.

¹²⁵ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. I, 147.

power. Notice in the following paragraph a rhythm or a cadence that seems to anticipate the “rap” beat of today’s popular culture:

All along His life you shall see these two. At his birth; a cratch [manger] for the Child, a star for the Son; a company of shepherd viewing the Child, a choir of Angels celebrating the Son. In His life; hungry Himself, to show the nature of the Child; yet feeding five thousand, to show the power of the son. At His death; dying on the cross, as the ‘Son of Adam;’ at the same time disposing of Paradise, as the ‘Son of God.’¹²⁶

It makes one wonder if phrases like those above might be included in the mix of imagery with sound (in this case “rap”), to accompany a homily that seeks to build bridges with the young men and women who are our audience? One thing is for sure. When a preacher develops an ear for good communication, he or she will be able to hear whether a word or phrase strikes the senses and resonates with the audience.

Dramatic Life in the Text: As Andrewes taught us in the earlier chapter, many of the features associated with drama in the traditional sense are present in a homily that brings the text to life. The first of these features is action. One of the complaints from the postmodern listener about the “three points and poem” sermon is its inertia. It’s not very active. No significant movement or momentum is implied in such preaching – preaching that Fred Craddock has described as “three trips down the hill.” Narrative preaching on the other hand has the capacity for movement, as it follows and unfolds from the pace and mood of the text. In the narrative the preacher is re-telling the story with a blend of imagery and real life issues and responses. Jana Childers says, “The sermon as a narrative is action. It is action that takes its direction from the flow of the life of the biblical text. It is action that moves the text’s imagery, threading biblical images together

¹²⁶ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 22.

with the stuff of listener's lives."¹²⁷ Movement, imagery, and relevant identification with the listener as Childers suggests, are all qualities that awaken the soul of the present generation.

A second of the features associated with drama is the ability to draw and maintain the listener's interest. The postmodern age is an image-rich age; therefore, postmodern preachers should draw on image-rich narratives and stories that help tell the primary epic of the gospel. Since great, irreducible truths are the truths that matter, no story should be allowed to spoil the gospel story. Storytellers are the gleaners – watching movies, watching people, reading plays, novels, and so forth. We are trying to glean secondary narratives that illuminate the Bible as the ultimate truth.

Both of my grandfathers were storytellers. One of them was a master at embellishment and intrigue. When you jumped off of his lap, you knew that the “yarn he had just spun” was about entertainment and playful deception. He was fun, but not really faithful to a purpose. The other grandfather had a reason for telling his story. There was typically a moral or spiritual idea attached to an account of his life or experience, which meant that his reason for telling the story went beyond amusement. He wanted to transfer something of value to me. Such is the intent of stories which reach the heart and sincerely point to the gospel.

Calvin Miller suggests, “Ultimate stories tell life truths, truths that are so universal that they can speak to the smaller, particular truths of our hearts. Our members enter our churches with broken hearts; their life stories aren't working out. These attend us, filtering our sermons through their own crying needs.”¹²⁸ My experience with young

¹²⁷ Jana Childers, 43.

¹²⁸ Calvin Miller, *Spirit, Word, and the Story*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996) 161.

sailors and Marines is that their interest in preaching is less about the dissemination of ideas and more about making connection through those kinds of real life experiences. Thus, storytelling that stays faithful to the text and yet puts the hearer in touch with people on the level of shared humanity will help the listener identify with an idea in a way that triggers meaning and significance.

Finally, the last of the dramatic features that brings to life the text occurs under the best of preaching circumstances, where a spiritual encounter is made possible. It was Martin Luther who developed the notion of preaching as “encounter,” where the divine and human meet in a transaction. Consequently, Christ is made present in the listener.¹²⁹ For the postmodern hearer, this idea of connecting with the heart and not the head is appealing.

Lancelot Andrewes, through the medium of textual imagery, knew how to encourage such an encounter with pathos or emotion. In his 1620 Easter sermon of Mary Magdalene, Andrewes positions the listener with Mary at the empty tomb as the text reads (John 20:11) – *standing, weeping, and looking*.

She “stood by the grave,” a place where faint love loves not to stand. Bring Him to the grave, and lay Him in the grave, and there leave Him: but come no more at it, nor stand not long by it ... Mary Magdalene, she did it, and she only did it, and not but she ... love that *when others shrink and give over, holds out still*.

Mary stood at Christ’s grave and wept ... and not a tear or two, but she wept a good as we say, that the Angels that Christ Himself pity her, and both of them the first thing they do, they ask her why she wept so. See how she loved him? Whose presence she wished for, His miss she wept for; Whom she dearly loved while she had Him, she bitterly bewailed when she lost Him ... *Love running down the cheeks*.

Weeping without seeking, is but to small purpose. But her weeping hindered not her seeking, her sorrow dulled not her diligence ... Peter and John had looked

¹²⁹ Jana Childers, 30.

there before, nay had been in the grave, they. It makes no matter; she will not trust Peter's eyes, nor John's neither. But she herself had before this, looked in too. No force, she will not trust herself, she will suspect her own eyes ... *It is not enough for love to look in once.*¹³⁰

These kinds of images, “love holding out,” “love running down the cheeks,” and love that looks more than once,” are not created to manipulate the listener, but to stimulate the spiritual connection. They embody how the listener feels in the pain and emptiness of their own lives. Whether telling a biblical story or preaching a narrative, the preacher must first understand the listener's own experience, and then seek to match the emotional content of the characters. As a simple exercise one might ask, “What must the people in this story have experienced?” “What must they have felt while going through such an experience?” By engaging the human element, the preacher connects with the heart of the listener.

The Mix of Audio and Pictorial Imagery: As suggested previously, effective preaching in the military context will embody various forms or expressions of image making, as it brings to life the text in ways that touch the senses. That's right. We are going to have to share the pulpit!

Several years ago I prepared a sermon from Jeremiah 18, a text where one finds the powerful image of a potter working at his wheel in the making of a useful vessel from a lump of clay. In preaching the text I described the process of working a cold lump of clay on a turning wheel. The clay was softened in the hands of the potter, as I unfolded the text, by stretching, pulling, poking, and prodding till the clay was ready to shape under the touch of the potter's hand. The first time I preached the sermon I felt fairly confident that I had connected with the audience. However, when I preached the text

¹³⁰ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. III, 7-8.

sometime later, I decided to mix the audible homily with the pictorial. I invited a professional potter to preach the sermon with me. She sat at her wheel, working the clay in hand, just as I described it from the text. She “threw” the clay, pressed upon the clay, and finally used her careful touch to bring form to what was once a rigid lump. Both preacher and potter worked to connect the text with the audience that day. Needless to say, the mix of sight and sound made a completely different impact with the sailors who were a part of the audience.

Calvin Miller, in his book *Marketplace Preaching* asks, “What will be heard by the worshippers who come within the fellowship? ... What will be imaged in the sermon? Video paints pictures that the audience is to absorb. These guiding images must be visible, spiritual, and moral encounters ... The only important question for the Church is, Can the church become pictorial in order to live, or will it remain only audio and die?”¹³¹ The use of art, drama, movie clips, mime, dance and a vast number of audio-video techniques with and alongside the homily can reframe the message from God’s Word with arresting force. Thus providing for the postmodern listener, the short, creative bites of sight and sound.

Many chaplains may struggle to integrate these forms of communication, arguing that a sermon is a sermon, is a sermon. They are right. The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching reads,

Sermons are interpretations of scripture. Communities of faith employ and acknowledge other forms of edifying discourse, but a sermon properly understood interprets a sacred text for the life of the community and its members. The interpretation may be direct and implicit, may begin with the text or begin with a

¹³¹ Calvin Miller, *Market Place Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where It Belongs*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995. 115.

situation, but some conversation between contemporary concerns and scripture is included in every sermon.¹³²

So one might ask if the interpretation of the text is limited to the oral tradition of the homily? Or in a world that has changed drastically to communicate through images, is there room for scripture to be explained in and through other mediums? It is important that we don't confuse the message with the method. Chaplains who want to hit the mark with this generation must keep in mind that how you communicate God's timeless message will constantly be changing and yet, God's Word won't. The medium itself does not threaten the purposes of God. Only godless ideas will. The Word of God communicated in any and all images remains the same.

“One Eye on the Word, One Eye on the Listener”

T. S. Eliot said of Andrewes, “His sermons illustrate a determination to stick to essentials, an awareness of the needs of the time ...an indifference to matters indifferent.”¹³³ It could be said that Andrewes understood that the preacher should keep one eye focused upon the indispensables, the other on the needs particular of his day. Not unlike the postmodern climate of our time, Andrewes certainly upheld such a sensibility while preaching in an unstable world. He is a reminder to us that despite the cultural winds that blow, our gaze of ministry is fixed, our course is steadied by the unbending commitment to engage a needy generation with what matters the most. Of course, every generation is needy.

¹³² William H. Willimon, and Richard Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) 433.

¹³³ Florence Higham, 27.

Essentiality of God's Word: There is no doubt that for Andrewes, and for the postmodern preacher as well, the Bible is the one thing necessary in maintaining God's view and vantage in our sermons. Only this Book can offer our sermons the voice of God. God *reaches out to humanity* – this is the great assumption upon which the Bible proceeds. Karl Barth suggests that the Bible tell us “not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found a way to us.”¹³⁴ This is also the great assumption on which strong sermons proceed regardless of how a particular generation changes and deviates from its tottering position. Paul's epistle to the Romans offers striking yet sensible guidance to the preacher who seeks to uphold the God view, and at the same time communicate to the military service members who approach the Bible with speculation and uncertainty. The apostle Paul writes in three succinct phrases the essence of the preacher's relationship with the Scripture through all the phases of history and society. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone who believes ...”

First, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” As we labor toward an understanding of our audience, while examining the “how” of connecting with them, it is crucial that we do not end up neglecting the message itself. Leander Keck observes, “The Bible has seldom been rejected out right by a preacher. Its place is more like that of an old grandmother who has a little room in the house and who appears at meals but who has little real influence on the life of the family. Though honored occasionally, she is a tolerated relic ...”¹³⁵ Therein lies the danger of preaching in this tumultuous day. It is very easy to be overwhelmed by postmodernity's tidal-wave-like-force and the

¹³⁴ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Translated by Douglas Horton, (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1978) 43.

skepticism of the audience that rolls in with it. We want to relate to the audience, but often with the misconception that it means tolerating the text.

Our desire to engage with grace should never thwart us from handling the Bible with confidence, expounding God's Word with expectancy and authority. Our task is to help others grow to appreciate the Bible and one way is to find a confidence and love for it ourselves. Keck asserts that such a confidence comes when the preacher learns to "hear" the text for herself. In order to "hear" the Bible, one must cultivate the art of "listening to it, with it, and through it."¹³⁵ Lancelot Andrewes maintained such abiding certainty in the Scriptures by exploring some meaning or reference in them to himself. Each page of his devotions, almost every line has some strong word in it, some selected, compounded and compacted word, some heart-laden clause that served as the essence of that moment's interaction with the divine. That is where love for Bible is developed in preaching.

Second, "it is the power of God unto salvation." If the preacher relinquishes the reliance upon the supernatural presence of the living Word and its potential to change lives, no cultural insight can fill the void. Either God has spoken and still speaks to the hearts of every generation, or preachers are nothing but "talking heads." Too many of us lose sight of the fact that the gospel power is not always palatable to the listener. Yet it still has enduring capability to penetrate skeptical, calloused hearts and minds.

Tex Sample states that when the Word became flesh, it joined the indigenous practices of the culture in Jesus' time. The Word "pitched tent" *with* humanity. Such engagement is basic to the Christian faith. Every faithful attempt to be Incarnational

¹³⁵ Leander Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980) 20.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

requires this kind of indigenous engagement. This does not mean, however, that the church pitches tent with every practice in and of the culture. The church is not to be captive to something that is not faithful to the covenantal character of the Christian life.¹³⁷ Count on it. Navy chaplains will be required to proclaim godly truths that are counter cultural, principles that turn against the grain of today's culture. Yet we cannot water down the Christian faith into ten easy steps, or twist the promises of God into Jesus' plan for health and happiness. The gospel is inherently powerful.

Third, "to everyone who believes." While traveling through a town in the Midwest sometime ago, I drove past a small church building with a marquis in its front lawn that read, "Bible Believing, Conservative, Fundamental, Pre-millennial, Non-musical Church. Welcome!" For many postmodern listeners, all they know of the Bible is what they read on signs like that, or what they experience in the short sound bites via the radio or television. And often those experiences don't leave a good taste in their mouths. In actuality many are without a clue as to what the Bible is about. Therefore, the key in making way for belief in the listener of today is to coax them on an accompanying journey, to let them sample and taste of the Scripture's goodness.

In handling the Bible for postmodern listeners, a significant change is required in limiting the number of ideas introduced in any given sermon so that the listener can taste of the Word rather than be force-fed a seven course dinner of scriptural exposition! In this regard, the ability to foster faith in the listener is a result of the faith of the preacher who believes that God is able to effectively work in the small, carefully thought out images that create a connection with the listener. Lancelot Andrewes spoke of the short phrase in his sermon "Remember Lot's Wife": "it fareth with sentences as with coins: in

¹³⁷ Tex Sample, 105-106.

coins, they that in smallest compass contain greatest value are best esteemed; and in sentence those that in fewest words comprise most matter, are most praised.”¹³⁸ One of my mentors in ministry once offered similar advice in the craft of preaching. He said, “A good steward knows the proper rations to give at the proper time.” Belief for many of our listeners starts with the taste or a satisfying ration of the Word that eventually leads to an insatiable hunger.

Focus on People’s Needs: Andrewes’s example, to keep one eye on Scripture as the essential way of hearing God’s voice, and the other on the needs of the people, serves to construct a bridge between the Bible and the listener. The listener gets involved in a sermon and attached to the text when the preacher addresses an area their need. They want to know what God has to say for them in their brokenness or dilemma and thus are involved in the words of preaching. When our audience participates in the text, our words from the pulpit sing with sighs from within them; they move with motivation; they are charged with concern; they ring with the rhythm of life, and they pulsate with power.

For instance, to speak of my own passion for gardening may well hit target with my own interests but remains outside of the sphere of the average listener in my military congregation. But if a chaplain were to relate an experience of being separated from family for months on end, everyone within earshot resonates with the feeling and sense of separation at some level. The young and the not so young would hang onto the preacher’s words because they, too, have felt the sting of loneliness. The preacher then moves the listeners from their own world to the biblical world, with a bridge like, “The

¹³⁸ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. 2, 61.

passage we're going to look at today addresses how it feels to be separated from God....”
With that connection, people have been moved from indifference to identification.

In connecting with the needs of the listener we should be aware that in the postmodern climate, the “heart,” or intuitive and emotional response evoked within the listener is a more powerful and fruitful avenue than to relate to the “head,” where reason and information rule. A fallout of living in the information age is that people need to be shown that what they are about to hear will directly affect their lives, or they’ll tune out. Unlike a small child who wants to know the Bible simply to know the Bible, most adults in this generation want information that affects them now. They want connections to everyday life, to real-world living. So addressing the needs of today’s women and men of the Sea Services will mean touching the emotional and instinctive areas: this is the inmost self, the “gut level” self, the self of our feelings and sensitivities.

The role of emotion in moving the present generation through the words of a sermon can be compared to the action of spark plugs in an automobile. Gasoline may enter the combustion chamber, but without the spark igniting the process nothing happens. Lucy Hogan and Robert Reid, in *Connecting With the Congregation*, suggest that the most effective use of pathos in a sermon occurs when it helps listeners understand why you, as the preacher, *care* in a way that helps them, as listeners, *care* as well.¹³⁹ Perhaps more importantly, to help them understand why Christ cares.

When Andrewes preached his Good Friday sermon of 1604, he spoke to a crowd distracted and occupied with the urgency and busyness of their own lives. It was the season of Passion for the church, and the Andrewes was concerned that many would not be detained long enough in their schedules to regard the work and purpose of Christ’s

death. So in a wonderful move to aid the listener in considering why they should care, he “turned the tables” to show why Christ cares for them:

What was it that moved upon Him thus to become our surety, and to take upon Him our debt and danger? That moved Him thus to lay upon His soul a sacrifice for our sin? He was moved with compassion over us and undertook all this for us. Even then in His love He regarded us, and so regarded us that He regarded not Himself ... “Offered he was for no other cause, but because He would.” For unless He would, He needed not ... not for any necessity of justice ... nor for any necessity of constraint, but because He would.¹⁴⁰

Preachers today must engage the vital need and craving for reconnectedness to the One who cares “because He wants to.” We must help listeners grasp again the life and love in God that surrounds us and restores a sense of wholeness to every individual. We can do so when guided by wisdom and a willingness to enter their world.

CONCLUSION

Contained within a vast wealth of Scriptural wisdom is a tiny parable that offers great insight into the ministry of preaching. It speaks of a kingdom treasure from which things both old and new are brought forth (Mtt. 13:52) to benefit the people of God. This

¹³⁹ Lucy Lind Hogan and Robert Reid, 75.

¹⁴⁰ *Ninety-Six Sermons*, vol. II, 151-152.

nugget of truth reminds us of God's enduring faithfulness to use past and present, old and new to bless the nations. Preaching in this regard has profited from great preachers of the past. Yet because a sermon occurs with the context of a particular culture or community, it requires our vigilant look into the ever-changing future.

Lancelot Andrewes, one such treasure of old, has proven to be a tremendous gift to both his generation and to the generations of preachers to follow. Four centuries ago he devoted his life to the effective development of the preaching craft in order to bless the people under his care. The impact of his ministry in the pulpit has far transcended that, to reach into the twenty-first century and even to the Chaplain Corps of the United States Navy. From a careful study of his homiletic goals and style, we have been guided to look into our own world and evaluate our preaching as chaplains, especially as we pursue ways of engaging a contemporary culture with the gospel. This paper has pursued such a task. Its purpose is to acknowledge a paradox: We have taken from something very old to bring freshness to the preaching of the present culture, and to shake us from preaching indifferent to such a possibility. My concern for the Chaplain Corps is coupled with a bright expectancy that some will respond to the demand that comes to us from the men and women of the Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy - to embrace the present with relevant preaching, for their sakes.

I wonder how many generations of young men and women will return to our preaching after twenty years only to discover that nothing has changed for us. We're still saying the same things in the same way, and they walk away thinking, "Yep, pretty much what I remember." As biblical communicators, our task in preaching is not a simple one. It includes a willingness to understand our audience and find ways to penetrate

generational needs and ideologies. A tremendous challenge accompanies such a willingness to care enough for the text, to tend it as a treasure, so that we as chaplains will change to meet the needs of the community we serve. Andrewes offered such a steady source of freshness by his fascination with the essential text and its benefits to his listener. It would do us good to learn from him - to bring God's truth to bear upon a people who are searching for, yet uncertain of, truth and falsehood; of people open to "whatever," but skeptical, and "livin' large" while running on empty.

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