



Is preaching dead?

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Taking preaching's pulse

Amanda Wells

Interest in the aural word is far from extinct. Just think of the millions of people worldwide listening to more broadcasts than ever, as the rise of the iPod brought easy access to a plethora of podcasts.

Broadcasters like the BBC or Radio New Zealand make many of their programmes available in this downloadable format, while a site like www.podcast.com showcases more than 85,000 podcasts. Not everyone you see wandering around with white earbuds is listening to Lady Gaga; they might be digesting the latest Middle East analysis.

Gone are the days a cassette recording was the best way of catching up on a missed service. While many churches still use this technology, many more are exploring other possibilities. If you want to download sermons online, your main problem is sifting through their enormous availability. Twenty four hours a day of sermons could easily be coursing through your ears, if you were so inclined. A quick Google search reveals that New Zealand Presbyterian churches making their sermons publicly available via podcast include Hornby Presbyterian Community Church and Papakura East Presbyterian Church, and I'm sure there are others.

So the idea of listening to someone expounding on the Bible is hardly passé in 2010. Perhaps when people say that preaching is dead, they have in mind dull vignettes masquerading as exegesis. Anyone can recollect boring – or bad – sermons that they have heard. Sometimes they are actually more memorable than the good ones. But to suggest that churchgoers are dreading the word from the pulpit every Sunday is far from the truth.

Somewhat surprising research published in the Times of London last month suggests that 96.6 percent of churchgoers “look forward” to the sermon. Furthermore, the sermon gave more than 60 percent of respondents “a sense of God's love”.

The research even has validity: the survey of 300 worshippers of different denominations was carried out by the Durham University's Codec research centre to mark the 50th anniversary of its College of Preachers. Its authors claim bemusement at the results and suggest more work is needed to find out exactly why people appear to be so eagerly anticipating sermons.

Sermons are an opportunity for people attending to reflect, to be still, to listen and to simply not do anything for a space of time. These opportunities can be rare. A school teacher once told me that if one person in the class was actively listening, you were doing well – and perhaps ministers sometimes feel the same way about their audiences. People might be thinking their own thoughts, perhaps prompted by what you've said, but perhaps not. Some people listen by looking at you, while others staring at the floor may be concentrating or may be contemplating their shoe purchases.

Conversely, people can be very quick to express displeasure over sermons that they disagree with or feel are substandard, and less ready to offer thanks or praise. A sermon is a performance piece delivered every week, with expected high standards of originality, delivery and coherence. Whether you speak for 15 mins or 50, it's a peculiarly exposing position.

Another tidbit from the Times: in 2001 the Rev Chris Sterry, vicar of Whalley in Lancashire, set a new record for sermon length when he spoke for 28 hours and 45 minutes. Perhaps, like me, you're quite glad you weren't there. It's unclear what he preached on or whether the record required the presence of a congregation.

In this issue of *Candour*, contributors seem to feel preaching's reported demise is premature. You might expect ministers to say that, but then you might also expect they would not say that were they preaching regularly to a crowd of zero. Far from being dead, preaching, particularly the ability to speak and hold an audience without too many technological trappings, seems to be flourishing nicely. Perhaps it's the novelty factor in a world of tweets, youtube and facebook.

The next issue of *Candour* has the theme “small groups” and a deadline of 1 March. At this point, I am becoming desperate for contributions. If you have something (whether of success or failure) to say on the topic, your thoughts would be very welcome! Please email them to candour@presbyterian.org.nz.

The New Testament and preaching

Mark Keown*, Auckland

Preaching is a minister's bread and butter. As ministers of Word and Sacrament, ministers devote a good portion of their time preparing to deliver weekly messages to their people. Reflection on the Biblical narrative suggests that this is no surprise. From Creation through Word, the ministry of the prophets, the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, the proclaimed word of God has brought God's voice to his image bearers. We stand in this tradition.

When we read about the New Testament and preaching, we often read analyses of words for preaching, such as *euangelizomai* (preach the good news) and *kērussō* (herald), explore the differences between preaching and teaching, examine the content of the various sermons in the NT (for example, the parables of Jesus and the messages of Acts), enquire into the practices of Jesus and first century Christians. As we do, we seek clues as to how to do it today. These are all factors worthy of our contemplation.

In this short piece, I want to take things in a slightly different direction, encouraging us all to think about preaching from a refreshed angle. I want us to consider the New Testament documents themselves as sermon messages. As we do, I hope it will give fresh momentum for our proclamation of the Gospel. After all, we live in a complex technological age with a myriad of modes of communication, whether spoken, visual, electronic or creative. Preaching is also complicated, living as we do in a diverse social and philosophical environment, with postmodernism, multiculturalism, pluralism, dwindling church attendance and the marked effects of consumerism. As preachers we need all the help and encouragement we can get!

The New Testament is effectively a collection of 27 sermons. They are moments in time, when our forebears in the faith gathered together a set of material for a given purpose. They are all unique. With the Old Testament, with which the New Testament documents stand in continuity, they are the foundational documents for our faith and ministries. As whole works, I believe they give us a tremendous basis for preaching in all generations.

The first and earliest sermons are the letters of Paul (49-65 CE). Each letter is set in a moment, being Paul's response to churches and individuals who are facing issues.

They are real interactions between a church minister and his people. As we study the social and historical setting of Paul, his world, and the readers, and reflect on the content of the letter, we get a lesson in preaching. This is reinforced with modern rhetorical critical analyses of the ancient letter. The letters are not merely to be studied as letters (epistolography), but as speeches. They were designed to be delivered by a companion of Paul (or Peter, James, Jude etc), and read out, as if Paul himself were present. They are then, speeches as much as letters. As we explore Paul's letters from the perspective of sermons, we are instructed in many ways in what preaching was all about to Paul, and our own preaching can be enlivened. Space precludes a full analysis, but a few examples will suffice to get our minds working.

We find that the letters are full of Paul's personality and heart. In Philippians, for example, look at 1:3, 7-8; 3:2, 18; 4:1 and see his emotion. He is Paul the shepherd, expressing his love, his anger, his protectiveness, speaking of tears, warning and encouraging. We find in his letters his use of a variety of sources, techniques and genre. The use of the letter-form itself is using the technology and media of his day. He cites philosophical ideas (eg Household codes), Jewish sources (especially the OT) and hymn fragments (eg Phil 2:5-11). He uses examples, illustrations, at times exegetes or reflects on Scripture with Jewish exegetical techniques (eg Rom 4; Gal 4:21-31), at times he speaks topically (eg 1 Cor 12-14). He uses a variety of literary techniques such as parallelism and chiasm (eg Gal 4:4). Always he speaks relevantly. Sometimes he gets specific, at other times he speaks more generally. Paul encourages us to use the whole canon. There is constant reflection on the Old Testament, with quotes, allusions and echoes flowing through the text. His messages move freely through the language of the Trinity, and Christ crucified and raised is always at the centre. He moves from indicative to imperative, moves from the theological to the ethical, his letters mostly end very practically, borne of deep theological reflection. There is no one-size-fits-all approach as we read his letters. They are not only sermons, but lessons in preaching.

The other letters of the New Testament carry on this pattern, each born of moments in time, the first Christian ministers addressing congregations and people in moments. This encourages us to do the hard work of consideration of the social and historical context of each mo-

ment. We need to know the story behind the story and see how they dealt with it. We need then to think our context, and speak creatively and appropriately into our present. All this will enliven and inform our preaching.

For the writers of the letters of the New Testament and Revelation, the story of Jesus, in continuity with the OT, has become the central point of theological reflection for the writers. They constantly resort to Jesus. For Paul, the crucified Jesus is the heart of theology and praxis, with believers called to live a cruciform life by the pattern of the cross. The letters call believers to hold unwaveringly to the apostolic tradition and to live worthy of the gospel of Christ. They speak of life under Rome, in family, church, and society, by the power of the Spirit.

The Gospels form the heart of the New Testament. The genre of these writings is highly contentious. Whether we see them as biographies, historiography or whatever, they stand now as comprehensive messages whereby the spoken Gospel has become written Gospel. The existence of four Gospels can be frustrating apologetically, but in fact, theologically and practically, it is inspired. They give us four windows into the same history. They are four moments in time, four sermons from early evangelists, each with great similarities, yet each unique and informative.

Treated as sermons, they are incredibly instructive. They show us that the heart of the Gospel is Jesus; each is his story. They are comprehensive, spanning his whole life, whether from the start of his ministry (Mark), his childhood (Matt, Luke), or his pre-existent glory (John). They all lead to the climax of the cross and resurrection. The original ending of Mark leaves us hanging here (Mark 16:8). The others give us accounts of the appearances. They are all full of people: Jesus interacting with the sick and healthy, the poor and rich, women and men, children and the elderly. They tell us the story of the struggles of discipleship and what it means to follow Jesus in different times and places. They include sermons in their own right, moments in synagogues (Luke 4:16-20), parables of the Kingdom (esp. Mark 4; Matthew 13) which need unlocking from their contexts, and dialogues in which Jesus interacts with individuals. They are not letters per se (although Luke is addressed to Theophilus), but are narratives, encouraging us to use this genre alongside more prosaic forms. They all continue the OT and Jewish Second Temple Judaism story, building on it. They quote the OT, speak of promise and fulfilment and inspire us to preach the whole story.

Their differences are of critical importance. As we ex-

plore their contexts, we get a lesson in preaching. Mark, probably writing from Rome to believers at the time of Nero, writes a Gospel full of encouragement to stand firm in persecution. Matthew writes later with a Jewish perspective, drawing out Jesus as Messiah and as fulfilment of the OT. Luke's two-fold work is addressed to Theophilus, and so must be read against a Greco-Roman world-view as he seeks to tell the story of Jesus. John's Gospel appears the latest and takes a different tack on the same story, telling us about Jesus in another way, speaking more philosophically and theologically, and so giving us Jesus through a new lens and with a higher christology. This tells us we can tell the story differently. Note however, that the Jesus in each is the same man, yet his story can be told in diverse ways.

The sermons give evidence of a multiplicity of sources. Mark is probably the first, then there is the material called Q and Matthew, while Luke and John have their own material. This encourages us to be eclectic in our own approach. The way they use their sources, shaping them for their situation, encourages us to do the same, bringing alive the story for each successive generation.

The narrative of Acts is hugely important to encouraging us in our preaching. Not only do we have embedded in Acts a variety of sermons (Acts 2:14-41; 3:11-26; 7; 13:13-41; 14:14-18; 17:22-31), but it shows us that the ongoing story of the Church is to be utilised in our proclamation. The sermons themselves are lessons in contextualisation. Compare, for example, the sermons of Acts 13 and 17, where Paul gives almost completely different messages to Jews in a Psidian Antioch synagogue and to Greeks in Athens. In one, he draws on the OT, giving a narrative of continuity and fulfilment. In the other, he uses Greco-Roman theology and quotes their poets, not even mentioning the crucifixion! Yet, Jesus lies at the centre and God is the prime mover. Stephen's speech is a glorious account of the OT; sadly, he was killed before he reached the punch line, Jesus. The whole of Acts itself gives us a living example of how the first believers took the teaching of Jesus and lived it out. This is incredibly helpful, especially in understanding church and mission. The whole narrative encourages us to be students of history, as Luke preaches the story of the expansion of the Church. Our sermons should be replete with stories from our world bringing alive the Gospel.

The final sermon in the New Testament is Revelation. This is perhaps the most complex sermon. It is written in a genre alien to our world (except in sci-fi) but highly familiar to its readers: apocalyptic. It warns of suffering, persecution and struggle. It is a message of hope to a suf-

fering Church. It is full of rich symbolism, figuratively bringing alive the message. It is embedded with hymns giving windows into worship. It speaks of the intervention of God, the vindication of his people, the climax of history, and finishes with an inspiring picture of a renewed heaven and earth full of God's Shalom. The controversies over its interpretation speak of its complexity, and also its ability to speak into a myriad of situations. It is full of the OT and can be cross-referenced at many points to the Gospels. As noted above, the story of Jesus is now the heart of the Christian message.

I hope this has whet your appetite. When we look at the writings of the New Testament as sermons from a moment in time but inspired by God for all times, we are encouraged in our own preaching.

In conclusion, four things stand out to me. First, our preaching must be Trinitarian with Christ at the centre. Central to Christ is the climax of the story, his death and resurrection. He is our salvation; this is our pattern for life. We must keep telling this story with unwavering commitment. Secondly, the sermons of the New Testament are shaped by context and the moment. They are all so different, while telling the same story. We must deeply reflect on the contexts of each New Testament sermon. Equally, we must be people of contemplation of our his-

tory and our present, and we must relate our messages well. We must be as committed to knowing our world and relating Christ to it as the writers of the New Testament were. Thirdly, reflection on the sermons of the New Testament encourages us to be creative in our preaching. While never wavering from the Gospel story, we can employ a variety of genre, media and approaches. We do not need to be beholden to one or other. In certain ages and situations, some techniques will be more relevant than others. In an age where the people of God tend to be shallow and easily bored, we have a license to be creative. However, we must take care not to let the medium get in the way of the message or let the message be lost in consumerism; the message is what matters. Finally, the New Testament documents are full of stories and story. We should not be scared to tell our own story and reveal our own hearts, like Paul. We should draw on other stories from our world and history, like Luke. We must continue to preach the whole Biblical narrative, for the New Testament continues a story that goes back to creation. We can draw on stories from all cultures and times, whether art, the poets, the OT, the writings of Rome and Second Temple Judaism, or for us, our own world in all its complexity. What does it all mean for you?

**The Rev Dr Mark Keown is a Senior Lecturer in Theology (NT) at Laidlaw College*

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Is preaching dead?

Kevin Ward, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, Dunedin

There is a definite sense among many that, as a result of all the cultural changes that have taken place over recent decades, preaching has had its day. This is particularly since the digital revolution has led to multi-dimensional and mediated communication styles, which means that one person standing up in front of a whole lot of others telling them what to believe and what to do is simply no longer effective. So, after a long and honourable history, it is time to recognise its death and allow it to “rest in peace”.

For those of us who have been around for some time, this is not a new contention. I heard it often enough when I was training for ministry in the antiestablishment 1970s. But going back another century, in his famous Lyman Beecher lectures on preaching at Yale Divinity School in the 1870s, Phillips Brooks spoke of the “obstinate aversion the age has to preaching.” If he were to be giving those lectures today, no doubt Brooks could make the same reference. However, I am sure that, if he did, he would also assert, as he did then, that if we felt that was so, we should “look first for the fault in [y]our preaching, and not in the age.”

In agreement with Brooks, the argument I want to advance is that if many think that preaching is dead, in the sense of being finished, it is because much of it is in fact dead, in the sense of being boring and dull rather than living and life-giving. When we were reworking our course structure for the new Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, we decided to name our course on preaching “Transformational Preaching” because we were anxious to emphasise the fact that preaching is active and about doing something – bringing life that transforms the lives of individuals and communities. Another contention I would make is that much of the problem in our church life is that much of the preaching does not in fact achieve this, nor indeed aim to do so.

Again the argument is not new. In 1965, the great postwar German preacher Helmut Thielicke wrote a book called *The Trouble with the Church*. In it he argued the core of the trouble was the quality of the preaching, which “has disintegrated to the point where it is close to the stage of dying” and “no longer reaches people, because it is boring and colorless.” Once again, 50 years on I would suggest sadly that the same diagnosis might be made, and if that is so, then maybe it is time to bury it.

There are two things we need to pay attention to in order to renew our preaching and free it to again be able to accomplish in the life of the Church what it has done through the 2000 years of its history. The first is to allow God, or perhaps more specifically Christ, to occupy the central place in our preaching. Phillips Brooks in those lectures at Yale defined preaching as “truth through personality”: a definition that became central for over a century. It involves two factors; the truth of the Scriptures and the personality of the preacher. In the 1970s, others began drawing attention to the need to give consideration to our context; the world we communicate into. Finally, others drew our attention to the role of the specific hearers of the sermon. So there were four elements to pay attention to in preaching: the scriptures, the preacher, the world and the hearers. I used this model, popularised in New Zealand by Paul Windsor¹, for a number of years, and there is much that is helpful in it.

However, over the past few years I have come to realise that the most critical element in life-giving preaching is missing from it: God who gives new life through Christ by the Spirit. James Torrance in *Worship Community and the Triune God of Grace* argues that many preachers are in effect unitarian and have a view of preaching that has “no doctrine of the mediator or sole priesthood of Christ, is human centred, has no proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit... We sit in the pew watching the minister ‘doing his thing’, exhorting us ‘to do our thing,’ until we go home thinking we have done our duty for another week.” The aim of preaching is not the sermon itself, but the one to whom it is directing those who hear it, the living Christ. Tom Wright claims that “preaching is meant to be an occasion, when so to speak, God happens; when that strange and yet familiar moment comes upon us, and we know we have been addressed, healed, confronted and kindled by the one who made us and loves us.” For me, this is the critical factor in evaluating whether preaching or mere talking has occurred. Have those present encountered the living God. Do you and I as we prepare our sermons have a sense of God’s Spirit revealing Good News to us as we study the Scriptures? Do we have a sense of Christ being present with us as we begin to share this with others? When that occurs, the preaching is certainly not dead. So that is the first thing. Do we have an expectation that God will act in and through our preaching and do we give space for God to do so?

The second thing we need to pay attention to is our style or form. While I would argue that preaching is one of the unchanging means God uses to fulfil God's mission (indeed, in agreement with Dietrich Bonhoeffer I would regard it as a *sacramentum verbi* - sacrament of the word), I would contend just as strongly that in order to achieve this, its form and style have changed as it has encountered different cultural and historical contexts. So black preaching in the US is appropriately very different than that which might be found in Anglo Saxon England. With the vast cultural changes that have occurred in our society, it would be foolish to think that the forms and styles in which we pray as we move into the second decade of the 21st century should be the same as they were 50, or even 20, years ago. And again a part of the problem is that many preachers have not taken the task of preaching seriously enough to make it a priority to spend time working to change their preaching style and develop as preachers so that the form and style of their preaching connects better with the kind of world we live in. They simply continue to preach in the kind of outmoded form they learned to preach when they trained 20 or 30 years ago.

I came to this realisation in the late 1990s. I had a very good reputation as a preacher. It was perhaps the thing I was most well known for. But I came to the realisation that with all the changes in the culture, the way in which I preached needed to change if I was going to communicate in a way that was effective with people under about 35. So I began a process, which included taking a sabbatical from preaching for a year, through study and listening to other effective preachers, of changing what I did. I now find that when I pull out any of my sermons that are more than about 10 years old, I couldn't preach them. They belong, as it were, to a different era. They may have been effective then but today would sound dead.

There is much talk of and call for renewal and reformation in our church life today. What will bring this about? Many look to new programmes, techniques or even technologies. However, the more prophetic and helpful thinkers on the challenges we face, such as those in the missional church movement, see the problem as being much deeper than a few tweaks here and there that these might bring. What is needed is a fresh vision, or a new imagination, of what it means to be the people of God in this very different world we live in. This is a reimagination that must be birthed and inspired by God and, as always, God does this most profoundly and creatively through the Scriptures. Thus these advocates for change see preaching as being more important, not less important, in the life of the church today. Walter Brueggemann speaks of "Preaching as Reimagination." He says that "Pastors are

world makers. Like the prophets of Israel, we render a new world through our words... And if you won't let God use you to make a new world, through faithful words, then all you can do is service the old one."

This is the role we are called to as ministers and leaders, and so nothing is more central to our calling than giving ourselves to the task of preaching, which helps those who are our church understand what it means to be a living, breathing, visible, communal sign of the presence of Christ and the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. Church historian EC Dargan writes that "decline of spiritual life and activity in the churches is commonly accompanied by a lifeless, formal, unfruitful preaching, and this is partly as cause, partly as effect. On the other hand, the greatest revivals of Christian history can most usually be traced to the work of the pulpit, and in their progress they have developed and rendered possible a high order of preaching." Is preaching dead? Sadly, I would have to answer often "yes", and the consequence is a dead church. A critical factor in the resurrection of the latter is the resurrection of preaching that is living with the presence of God, shaped so as to connect with the culture we inhabit and so bringing the new life in Christ to God's people.

References

- 1 Paul Windsor was formerly Principal of Carey Baptist College and is now Director of Preaching for the Langham Partnership in the Pacific.



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Not dead: Alive and kicking!

Diane Gilliam-Weeks, Upper Clutha Presbyterian Parish, Central Otago

“Is preaching dead?” Of course it depends on what you mean by preaching. If you mean “pontificating on and on, six feet above contradiction in order to impress people with your Biblical and theological erudition”... then well, preaching is six feet under.

Today people have infinite ways to explore the Word of God that don't involve sitting in church listening to that kind of preaching.

But if you mean engaging the heart mind and spirit of a congregation by weaving the good news of Jesus Christ into a beautiful tapestry of image and colour and touch and smell that taps the imagination, and invites transformation and action in surrender to God – then of course preaching is alive and kicking.

It's my experience that the latter can be achieved without gimmickry when we share our adventures with the text, as we question and doubt and explore and discover its contours and relationships with the issues people are facing today.

Our hermeneutics and homiletics class during my ministry training was the only course I ever took which ended with a standing ovation for the teacher. Mary Huie-Jolley had taught us how to journey with a text by identifying repetition, character, and contrast; how the text sat in dialogue with other texts. It was a kind of exegetical *Lectio Divina*. It was an exciting method and I'm still using it today before I click onto Google to see what anyone else has said about it.

When all the learning styles are involved, a spoken feast can be greatly enhanced by visual, kinaesthetic and even olfactory side dishes. Because God speaks to some people through visual images not just verbal imagery, the use of PowerPoint enables us to connect with people at a deep level. For me, half the fun of writing a sermon is looking for the perfect image.

Thanks to advances in communication technology there are forms of preaching that wouldn't have been dreamed

of 30 years ago. If Rob Bell has already said it better than I could, I'm not shy about using a NOOMA DVD in place of a sermon (though I wouldn't do it more than once or twice a year). And we have Covenant Players too instead of a sermon. All engaging people in the Word of God in ways to which they can relate.

And sound amplification means people can hear us without our having to have the voice of James Earl Jones and the ability to project like Valerie Vili. Why do you think pulpits were so high?

If we assert that the exploration of the Word of God is an important component of corporate worship, then it seems to me preaching of some sort or other will always be alive.

Why? Because while it's easy to facilitate discussion in a small study or house group, when anymore than six to 10 people are present, there simply isn't time for *full* participation without

taking more time than people want to sit in church. So we need preachers.

Of course, people can worship without exploring the Word of God, but even in a Taize service where there is no sermon, there is ten minutes silence to reflect on the Word. However, Taize does offer brilliant Bible study between worship services for the same reason we have sermons.

Asking whether preaching is dead is also like asking if people have anything to learn or whether people can be inspired to closer intimacy with God. Naturally, a sermon isn't the only vehicle of inspiration and teaching in a service of worship. In fact the whole thing, from walking in the door, to being sent out, can be an integrated tapestry that restores and inspires us to go out from the gathered people of God to live the message of Christ. As Denzil Brown once said, “get me to a synagogue I feel a sermon coming on”.

Asking whether preaching is dead is also like asking if people have anything to learn or whether people can be inspired to closer intimacy with God

The centrality of the sermon

Ben Dykman, Greenlane Presbyterian, Auckland

Many today are asking whether there is still a place for preaching in the Church? After all, so much has changed and is changing. We now live in the age of the media, Internet, and all the rest that goes to make up our high-speed, silicon-chip, cybernetic age. Amidst this high-tech, computerised background, is there still place for the monologue-style sermon? Has the day not come to finally dispense with this antiquated, archaic method of communication, and move to modern methods of high-tech communication?

I firmly believe it has not! Preaching still has a vital and vibrant part in the church today, despite all the mod cons and high speed paraphernalia that has enriched 21st century life. There is no doubt that multi-media and power-point presentations assist in conveying the timeless message of the Gospel, giving a visual dimension and offering unique opportunities for creativity and variety. However, preaching cannot be dispensed with in the Christian Church because it is the central means of conveying God's voice through his revealed word. That is not to say that God can't or won't speak through other means, but throughout history, both BC and AD, God has spoken and we must speak his words today. John Stott comments: "It is God's speech which makes our speech necessary. We must speak what He has spoken. Hence the paramount obligation to preach."

God spoke to the prophets, who were instructed to speak to the people of their day. The Son of God spoke in his ministry on earth and his words were recorded in the Gospels and letters. The Holy Spirit speaks through the recorded Scriptures. The Trinity is involved in communicating by the spoken word.

As one writer once said, God only had one son and called him to preach! Preaching is God's divinely appointed means of communication - his heart for his church. Preaching the revealed word of God with authority and clarity is fundamental to being the true Church of Jesus Christ. Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Note Paul's instruction in 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" and Romans 10:14 "How, then, can they call

on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" Our Lord is identified as the one who "...came preaching"

As you trace the development of the church in history, it has always, and will always progress through powerful, authentic, energetic and compelling preaching. This was seen in the preaching of the apostles, the Early Church fathers, the preaching friars, the Lollards, Luther, Calvin, Baxter and the Puritans, the Wesleys, Whitfield, Spurgeon, Lloyd Jones, and today preachers like Billy Graham, Charles Swindoll, John McArthur, John Piper, John Stott, etc. All these have faithfully proclaimed and are proclaiming God's Word to their world by preaching. When we treasure preaching and participate in it, we stand amongst these giants who changed the flow of human history and who made a significant contribution to establishing the kingdom of God and the church as we know it today. Preach they did, and preach we must do!

Preaching was and always will be God's primary appointed means of declaring the red hot word of God. Haddon Robinson writes, "...Paul encouraged his young associate Timothy to 'preach the Word'. Preach means 'to cry out, herald, or exhort.' Preachers should pour out the message with passion and fervor in order to stir souls. Not all passionate pleading from a pulpit, however, possesses divine authority. When preachers speak as heralds, they must cry out 'the Word'. Anything less cannot legitimately pass for Christian preaching."

The idea that preaching is obsolete and unnecessary for the 21st century; that it is a dying and outmoded form of communication, an echo from an abandoned past, is a misnomer. Preaching that is compelling, dynamic, engaging and Word-based will always have a place in the church. It was this type of preaching that established the early church, despite the opposition and oppression of the Roman government. It was this kind of preaching that was so ably recaptured by Luther and Calvin in the Reformation. It will be this kind of preaching that will keep the Church as the mouthpiece of God in the days ahead and until the day the Lord returns.

I have noticed with interest that the power of a compelling, carefully thought out monologue has been powerfully used in history, even outside the Church of Jesus Christ.

One only need think of the power that men like Stalin and Hitler were able to wield through preaching! Ideas moved nations and challenged the world. Even today the words of orators and politicians sway the masses and win elections. Don't be deluded by some who have given up on the power and influence of compelling preaching. We cannot afford to lose confidence in the power or the mystery of powerful, compelling preaching

Note these somewhat flowery words from the past, written by Matthew Simpson: "His throne is the pulpit; he stands in Christ's stead; his message is the word of God; around him are immortal souls; the Saviour, unseen, is beside him; the Holy Spirit broods over the congregation; angels gaze upon the scene, and heaven and hell await the issue. What associations, and what vast responsibility!"

There is almost a mystery, another dimension, that is entered into when God's word is creatively and enthusiastically preached. I have noticed with interest the recapturing of the "narrative" in postmodern thought. The narrative has emerged as the integral part of the emergent church movement. Is this because of the void created by having abandoned the authoritative preaching of God's word? I would implore those who have the unparalleled privilege of standing in the long tradition of so many orators of the past, including our Lord himself, to preach the word, to be faithful at every opportunity in season and

out. As Baxter, the Puritan of days gone by, said, "preach as never to preach again, a dying man to dying men." Be mindful that preaching is God's appointed method of communicating the word of God to the church of God. Be unashamed, unapologetic, faithful, fearless and wholehearted!

Let me close by quoting from John Stott. Having heard him preach God's word on a number of occasions, I am confident that he has every right to make these statements. "That is what I mean when I claim that, even in this age that is saturated with the most elaborate media of communication, preaching remains sui generis. No film or play, no drama or dialogue, no seminar or lecture, no Sunday School or discussion group has all these elements in combination. What is unique is not an ideal or an atmosphere, but a reality. The living God is present, according to his covenant pledge, in the midst of his worshipping people, and has promised to make himself known to them through word and sacrament. Nothing could ever replace this".

Recommended reading

I believe in preaching – John Stott

Preach the word – Dennis Lane

Expository preaching – John McArthur

Biblical preaching – Hadden Robinson

Lectures to my students – C.H. Spurgeon

Want to sharpen up your preaching this year or train others to preach?

'**One Step Ahead Preaching**' is a new resource created to help both experienced and beginner preachers in New Zealand to be more effective. The DVD material provides insights from some of our country's highly respected preachers from across the denominations - such as Murray Robertson, Paul Windsor, Geoff New, Brad Carr and others. It tackles issues like how to get a better response from your congregation, how to tell better stories, how to connect well with kiwi audiences and how to sharpen up your delivery. There are 9 sessions for experienced preachers and a further 3 sessions for beginners which cover things like how to examine (exegete) a passage of Scripture; the values that drive preaching and the skills and tools of the trade.

DISCOUNT: From Feb 1 – March 20 there is a discount on this resource when purchasing online. See: www.onestepahead.org.nz. On this website you'll also find the 'One Step Ahead Worship' material for training worship leaders, and information about the official One Step Ahead Preaching launch on 21 February at the Auckland University Fale.

Is preaching really dead?

Steve Millward, *Crossroads, Kaimai*

The preacher maybe, but not preaching!

I've known a few times where I've been dead, but that doesn't mean preaching is dead. If preaching is dead, I'm dead because I believe I am called by God to preach.

My experience, over the last 25 years as a preacher to all age groups and many churches around New Zealand, tells me that preaching is very much alive and well in the 21st century. Allow me to share with you some of the things I have found that help preaching to be alive and well. I will major on the "preacher" and something of his/her world.

My world:

In the beginning, "God said..." and the world was created. Through out the Bible, God continued to speak to people. God became flesh in Jesus Christ and he spoke and taught people. They say God had only one son and he was a preacher. Jesus gave us a command in Mark 16:15 to "preach the good news to all creation." His Word to us has not changed.

Church history confirms that wherever there has been great preaching there have wonderful times of renewal and growth with a significant impact on society at large. (See John R.W.Stott's book - *I believe in Preaching.*)

I have been preaching since 1985 and I find that this aspect of my ministry has produced more fruit than anything else.

I believe Christianity is taught and caught. (See the Gospels.)

I believe there are things God can't do!

I believe the preacher, the content, the act of preaching, and the context, are of equal importance.

Your world:

You need to fill this in, but remember it will influence how you interpret what follows.

The Preacher and his/her world:

Calling

I know I was called to be a preacher. I wasn't called, first and foremost, to be a moderator, sociologist, historian,

psychologist, leader, or a mercy worker. I have been called to be a preacher. That changes things. The problem, as I see it, is not that preaching is dead, but that some who are doing it may need to ask themselves, "is this my primary or secondary calling?" and take the appropriate action.

Fire in your belly:

This definitely helps the preacher and the hearers. Fire attracts and it helps us overcome our fear. Jeremiah said, "...His Word is in my heart like a fire..." (20:9). This helped Jeremiah and it will help us preachers today. Preaching is a message and the way we deliver the message. Fire in the belly helps make preaching effective. Let's be thermostats instead of thermometers.

Faith:

Yes, we believe in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sin, but what do I believe God for this week, this month, this year? Jesus said, "If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." Faith is contagious.

Preach up a storm:

The preacher needs to be full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Stephen in Acts 6 is described in this way, but when he preached to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, they covered their ears and stoned him. A preacher is part of a community of faith and for the preaching to be effective there needs to be faith in the preacher and the hearers, so preach up a storm - stir up faith in your community. John Wesley used to say, "Preach faith until you have it!"

Faithful and creative:

Let us not separate what God has joined together. Creativity in the context of being faithful to the Gospel/Word helps enormously.

The glass is half full:

"A cheerful heart is good medicine." If we want to minister medicine, it helps to have some humour and to be positive in the way we interpret and apply scripture. This gives hope and lifts people. It is contagious.

Energy:

In Acts 1:8, we are promised supernatural power and that means energy; energy is contagious and this helps our preaching no end. The flipside to this is we can release

natural energy into our preaching through being physically fit. Paul said. "Physical training is of some value." (1Tim.4:8) It is important to realise we are our message.

Go another round:

Sometimes we're in an "in" season and sometimes we are not (2Timothy 4:2). Preaching remains relevant, but the season we're in may make it seem irrelevant and ineffective, so go another round, "for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Gal 6:9). Paul said, "Fight the good fight!" Nurture a fighting spirit! Sometimes we move on too quickly and preaching suffers for it because we have sent a message out that negates our preached message.

Personality/charisma:

God uses me as me, and you as you, so let us let our light shine. Do the people know you and what you want? We get the church we are and the church we want. Truth through personality equals living truth and preaching that is alive. David beat Goliath as David with his sling, not in Saul's armour.

Upskill:

I was under the Rev John Balchin, whom I regard as one of the greatest preachers New Zealand has had. For over 10 years I learnt from him, for "iron sharpens iron". Now my church sends Ruth, my wife, and me to the Hillsong Conference each year - all expenses paid (Crossroads is a great Church). There I learn and catch their spirit. I catch their faith and their passion, as I watch and listen to some of the greatest preachers in the world. I also note that they use technology in their message time sparingly, if at all.

Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. What are our people catching from our preaching?

A message is preached before a message is preached:

What precedes and what follows the preaching has an enormous impact. The welcome, the coffee, the décor, the toilets, the vision board, the power-point or DVD being played, the foyer, the building, the people, how I am dressed... A message is preached before a message is preached. We need to strive in everyway to make the "teaching about God our Saviour attractive." (Titus3:10)

Relevance:

I think 50 percent of a message should be application. That keeps the preaching relevant and keeps us real.

Goal oriented:

Jesus was goal oriented (Luke 13:32) and believed in reaching his goals. He, like Paul, did not preach "aimlessly". What do I want to achieve with this message is a good question to ask. Let us not preach aimlessly, but with specific goals in mind. That keeps preaching alive because we want a living response.

Tears help:

"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy." (Ps127:5) Tears help release our frustrations, failures, and fears, and God's blessing onto the precious seed we sow. Our tears can water those seeds and over time there is a harvest, so do not give up. God is on His way!

God bless you in your preaching!

Post Graduate Scholarship 2010

The Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership invites applications from suitable candidates for the 2010 Begg-Dickie Post Graduate Scholarship. The scholarship aims to promote and develop the theological and teaching resources of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In order to qualify for 2010, you must have graduated from the Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership (previously the School of Ministry) between 2005 and 2009. The scholarship will contribute to the cost of fees, travel and living expenses for one year, incurred as part of post-graduate study in New Zealand or abroad, as approved by the Senatus of the Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership. If working towards a two-year MTheol or three-year PhD, the recipient may apply for a further one or two years funding, subject to approval by Senatus. On completion, it is expected that the recipient proceed to service within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

For further details, see www.presbyterian.org.nz. The submission deadline is 31st March 2010.



Mission and Unity: Edinburgh 1910-2010

John Roberts, Methodist Mission and Ecumenism secretary

It's almost a hundred years since the great World Missionary Conference was held in Edinburgh, Scotland. The June 1910 conference drew together Christians from many churches to think strategically about the world-wide mission of the Christian Church.

The organisers of the Edinburgh 2010 centennial conference see their gathering as a time of thanksgiving for the progress in mission God has made possible, as well as providing a focus for addressing the challenge of mission in the 21st century.

While those attending the 1910 conference were mostly white, western, male and Protestant, it was nonetheless a groundbreaking and momentous event. Participants recognised the need to move beyond colonialism and to welcome the birth and maturing of independent and self-governing churches around the world. It is also generally held that this conference paved the way for the diverse beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement.

Today the missionary commitment of the church must go hand in hand with its ecumenical commitment. Historically the question of Christian unity, as raised by missionaries, was for practical reasons. Often it was to avoid unnecessary competition. In some parts of the world the mission field was shared out between different churches. Sometimes missionaries worked on common projects such as Bible translation.

Cooperation between missionaries led to reflections on the divisions between the churches. While there was rivalry between missionaries sent by different churches, those who were first in the mission field were also the first to recognise the scandal of Christian division. How were people to understand reconciliation in Jesus Christ when the churches and their leaders were ignoring or fighting one another? How could Christian groups who lived in mutual hostility, preach one Lord, one faith, and one baptism in a credible way? There was no lack of ecumenical questions for the participants at the Edinburgh Conference of 1910.

Since 1910, Christians have learned much about how to work together, to share news of the love of God, and to witness to Christ in many different ways – defending the poor, struggling for justice, resisting racism, working for reconciliation, protecting the planet. Much of this has happened as Christians have learned to listen to one another and work

with others, of different faiths, or none. Without the impetus of 1910, much of this would not have happened.

The world has changed a lot since 1910 and once more mission must be thought about anew. Secularisation, post-modernity, new means of communication, interconfessional relations, inter-religious dialogue are amongst many important issues to be discussed. There is a similar sense of urgency in 2010 as there was in 1910. A world still wounded by division needs a gospel message that can bring people together. Such a message can't be proclaimed by discordant voices. It calls for a commitment to unity.

This article draws on Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2010 notes

The Parishes of St James & Westmere Wanganui

Are seeking a full time minister to work 50% within each parish.

Westmere a rural parish and St James a suburban parish are located close to each other and both are seeking a person with a personal prayerful relationship with God offering sound Bible base preaching.

This is an exciting opportunity to provide leadership and vision to two separate parishes operating in different settings. It is envisioned, that where practical the minister would work week about within each parish. Visit our website www.presbyterians-in-wanganui.org for further information.

The two parishes have a happy and healthy relationship with excellent communication channels.

Expressions of interest can be made to the convenor of the Board of Settlement.

Rev. John Peill

Email: johnpeill@globe.net.nz

Phone (06) 343 8639

Mission and Unity: Then, Now, and into the Future Edinburgh 1910-2010

Auckland 18-19 June 2010

This conference will mark the centenary of the landmark world mission conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 that not only reshaped the churches approach to world mission, but also led to the emergence of the 20th century ecumenical movement.

Dates

Beginning Friday 18 June 2010 at 3.00pm
Concluding Saturday 19 June 2010 at 4.30pm

Venue



Wesley Hall, St John's Theological College
202 St John's Road, Meadowbank, Auckland

Presentations

An historical overview
A gender perspective
An ecumenical perspective
A biblical perspective
A generation X/Y perspective
A multifaith society perspective
Cultural perspectives: Maori, Pacifica, Asian

*Presentations will use Edinburgh 1910
as a springboard for focussing on mission
and unity issues in the present and into the future*

Presenters

Confirmed to date:
Rev Dr Allan Davidson
Rev Dr Janet Crawford
Rt Rev John Bluck
Others still being approached

Planning group members

Mr Peter Bargh
Rev Dr Allan Davidson
Rev Dr Janet Crawford
Rev John Roberts (Convenor)
Rev Uesifili Unasa
Rev Dr Stuart Vogel

Contact

John Roberts
E-mail: mm-e@clear.net.nz
Phone 09-6266130

A Methodist Mission and Ecumenical initiative

I hope you have had a chance to get away. Three weeks at the Barrier: sun, sand, surf, dolphins and unbelievably good fishing. What more can I say?

I took away four books for reading over the holidays. *Getting to Maybe* by Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton applies the insights of complexity theory to lay out a new way of thinking about making change in communities, in business, and in the world. The book features great examples of both secular and faith communities influencing and leading positive change in the worlds around them. It's heartening, encouraging and adaptable in helping name some of the challenges we face as we reflect on the nature of Christian mission. It is a book you want to buy and keep.

In Amartya Kumar Sen's *The Idea of Justice* the Nobel-prize-winning economist argues that what we urgently need in our troubled world is not a theory of an ideally just state, but a theory that can yield judgments as to comparative justice; judgments that tell us when and why we are moving closer to or farther away from realising justice in the present globalised world. It's solid going, but a very readable book and includes a great survey of the main streams of thought that have contributed to our present ideas of justice. It's worth the effort.

A History of Christianity by Diarmaid MacCulloch. I am still making my way through this massive book, published last year. You are not going to agree with everything MacCulloch writes, but I wish I had read a 3000-year survey of Christian thinking and history like this before I started my theology studies. I have found it very helpful in understanding the origins and development of the breadth of Christian practices and thinking – and how things “fit” together. I am reminded again that many of the issues we face today have been thought about and wrestled with repeatedly through the centuries. MacCulloch also reminds us of how extraordinarily quickly Christian life and practise continues to grow in the developing world. There are more professing Christians now than ever before.

Yes, I did read another book which made me feel a little less like I was on study leave – the Booker-prize-winning *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel. It's a wonderfully written and exhaustively researched novel that reflects the power, faith, theology and corruption of the English reformation under Henry VIII, centred on the life of the man who became Henry's chief advisor, Thomas Cromwell.

The ideas that I thought about as I read these books included:

Innovation. On one hand time is the great innovator; our circumstances and situations change, and we adapt to them. But on the other, an individual or group driven by captivating visions or new ideas can have an enormously transformative effect on their communities. Many of these people have experienced an acute sense of call on their lives that demanded from them a sacrificial commitment to a new way of being.

Who is our neighbour? Our understanding of those with whom we are in community and who we are in relationship with is becoming more complex. Defining our neighbour geographically, ethnically, electronically (eg through Facebook, Twitter etc), or ideologically, impacts on the priorities and resources we give to those relationships and our understanding of ourselves. It also influences who we see as the outsider.

Diversity. How we continue to find a commonality among people and congregations who are from different ethnic backgrounds, located in different places, are different ages, are from diverse economic, educational and language backgrounds will be a major (if not the major) challenge for us in our decision-making processes as a national Church. In my own role, the major expressions of frustration and anger that I hear almost always have their origins in a group or individual feeling marginalised by Church rules or decision making.

Wealth and integrity. Our view of money and buildings and their use, the economies that support ministers, congregations and national Church functions are key in upholding outreach and mission expressive of the integrity and priorities of our Christian faith. For the sake of our Church and its witness, we can't continue to accumulate money and spend our time looking after under utilised or poorly used buildings.

How corrupt the Church has been, and how horribly Christians have treated one another (let alone the infidels) may be themes about which I would rather not be reminded. But in the end, it is the extraordinary robustness of our faith, the great courage of reformers, and yes, even the innovation and adaptability to new situations that have been such consistent qualities of those who have professed Christ through the centuries. There is though a wonderful faithfulness and trust that has been the quality of Christians at their best, and that has ensured that the Good News with which we have been entrusted continues to be proclaimed within and in spite of the complexities and challenges of today.

