

Making Sermons "Visual"

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An example from the Bible

Jeremiah 13:1-11, a very vivid and "visual" story (in the form of an enacted metaphor), easy to picture, with an interpretation at the end. How often should stories in sermons have an interpretation or explanation at the end? How often should we let the story stand on its own and let the congregation interpret?

Using visuals

Examples of visuals that support sermons: props (an empty bowl used to illustrate fasting, a jar of muddy water to illustrate mixed up priorities), costumes (a brocade bathrobe used for a role-play sermon), bulletin art by congregational members related to the sermon, sanctuary decorations that parallel a sermon theme, drawing or painting the sermon while it's being spoken, pictures on the projection screen. Should this kind of visual component be used in connection with every sermon? Should these be used occasionally?

Making language visual: metaphors and stories

Metaphors: abundant in the Bible, common in everyday speech. What are the best ways to use metaphors in sermons?

Stories: from the Bible, from the lives of other people, from books and the internet, from our own lives. How personal is too personal? Do we need to get permission to tell stories from the lives of real people?

Some of the kinds of stories in sermons: opening stories that draw people into the sermon topic, stories in the middle of the sermon to illustrate a specific point, stories at the end to illustrate what the sermon theme looks like in real life. Which of these three kinds of stories do you use most often? Which do you use least often? How could you grow in using them?

What do stories accomplish that principles and explanations do not? What are the characteristics of a good story? How can preachers learn to be better story tellers? Do stories in sermons work if they are read, or do they need to be told extemporaneously?

"The most memorable sermons I have heard and the ones of mine which I sense God 'wing into the hidden depths of many a heart' all tend to have one thing in common ... no screen (and plenty of internal image and metaphor that give more space for the imagination)."

(From an email from Paul Windsor February 2009)

Some major questions:

How can being "visual" in the sermon include something more than using the data projector?

Why do preachers so often take the vivid, image-filled stories of the Bible and turn them into principles?

How can preachers use metaphors, from the Bible and from everyday life, wisely and effectively?

What are the characteristics of effective stories in sermons?

Leonard Sweet (In *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 2001) believes that ministry in the 21st century will be EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image-driven, Connected). What does it look like to create image-driven sermons? Is it a good idea? Is it necessary for our time?