**Northern Synod: Lay Preachers Training 27-28 February 2018**

**Session 1: What is preaching?**

A reading: 1 Corinthians 1:21-24, 2:1-5

Opening prayer

An open discussion on the question: What is preaching?

**Preaching and the presence of Christ**

The Basis of Union, paragraph 4:

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of the God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people’s attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.

The theology of the Word (Barth)

The Word of God is:

* The second person of the Trinity
* The incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth
* The prophetic and apostolic (Biblical) testimony to Jesus Christ
* The preaching of Christ controlled by the Biblical testimony

As an example of the high view of preaching held by theologians of the Word (Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer etc), here’s some insights from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Finkenwalde lectures on preaching (Clyde E Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching*, Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1975):

The proclaimed word has its origin in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It neither originates from a truth once perceived nor from personal experience. It is not the reproduction of a specific set of feelings. Nor is it the outward form for the substance which lies behind it. The proclaimed word is the incarnate Christ himself… it is the Christ himself walking through his congregation as the Word. (p.126)

The proclaimed word is the Christ bearing human nature. The [proclaimed] word is no new incarnation, but the Incarnate One who bears the sins of the world… In the congregation all sins should be cast upon the Word. Preaching must be so done that the hearer places all of his needs, cares, fears, and sins upon the Word. The Word accepts all these things. When preaching is done in this way, it is the proclamation of Christ. This proclamation of the Christ does not regard its primary responsibility to be giving advice, arousing emotions, or stimulating the will – it will do these things too – but its intention is to sustain us. The Word is there that burdens might be laid upon it… Because it does so, it creates fellowship…it makes us members of the body of Christ… The Word makes individuals part of one body. (p.127)

**Preachers and the presence of Christ**

Bonhoeffer again:

I must refuse to indulge in tricks and techniques, both the emotional ones and the rhetorical ones. I must not become pedantic and schoolmasterish, nor begging, entreating, urging. I do not try to make the sermon into a work of art. I do not become unctuous and self-centred or loud and boastful. By forsaking my personal ambitions I accompany the text along its own way into the congregation and thus remain natural, balanced, compassionate, and factual. This permits the Word’s almost magnetic relationship to its congregation. I do not give life to it, but it gives life to me and to the congregation. The movement of the Word to its congregation is accomplished through the interpretation of it. (p.138)

On your registration forms of this training event, you were asked “What gifts do you think a Lay Preacher needs to have?” Among the many insightful and helpful responses one word was repeated more than any other: “humility”. I’ve been trying to explain the theological basis for that insight of yours.

**A personal activity:**

Remember the preachers through whom Christ reached out and commanded your attention…

**Shared worship:**

An act of thanksgiving for those preachers, and commitment of ourselves to these 2 days of training as preachers

**Session 2: The Elements of Preaching**

**The Gospel: what is it?**

The Gospel in the New Testament:

* Jesus to the Jews: Matthew 5:1-7:29
* Peter to the Jews: Acts 2:14-39
* Paul to the Jews: Acts 17:2-4
* Jesus to the disciples: Luke 24:25-32
* Paul to the church: Romans 1:1-6, 3:21-25a, 6:11-14, 12:1-21, 14:1-13,19
* Paul to the Greeks: Acts17:16-33

Summaries of Paul’s gospel: Acts 26:22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Philippians 2:5-11

My colleague, Tim Hein, says that it is hard to preach the gospel because we constantly default into something else – especially moralism. He says that there are two common distortions of the gospel: moralism (you must obey God – as defined in one way by the right and another way by the left – to be saved) and relativism (you can pretty much do what you like so long as you don’t hurt anyone). Tim says that there is a moralistic, relativistic and gospel approach to everything and to every biblical text.

**A Personal Activity**

Read Acts17 and 18

Take notes: Do you see any patterns? Do you see any exceptions to the patterns? Sit quietly with the patterns and exceptions… Write a short prayer for the world, for the church and for yourself.

**Session 3: The Elements of Preaching**

**The preacher and the context**

In groups, discuss your responses to the questions on your registration forms:

* What gifts do you think a Lay Preacher needs to have?
* What energises you to be a Lay preacher?

And talk about another question:

* What are the distinctive things about your context that affect your approach to preaching?

**Advice for preachers from preachers**

Tim Hein has this advice:

1. Two secrets of confidence:
   1. Prepare beyond what you need
   2. People want you to be relaxed and confident so they ca.
2. Own and think through the Physical Space
3. I always learn in my preparation. Then I get excited.
4. Be yourself – you will only be compared with someone else if you are trying to imitate them. No one compares The Beatles to U2 to Robbie Williams to Pink, to Coldplay.
5. Discovering who ‘you are’ in preaching will come with experience.
6. Listen to a great sermon, over and over again! Get past the content, to the rhythms
7. Listen to your own sermon recording. Which bits thrill you? Why? Which bits are boring? Why?
8. Ask people for frank feedback – dead honest. Ask them deep questions, get them to be specific
9. Preach the same good sermon several times in various places – it’s not cheating! Ok to do this to develop your craft.
10. After that – prepare new gear all the time (but have a couple on hand always)
11. Use your own voice – the gospel in Australian
12. Words:
    1. Use an economy of words
    2. If you repeat something, phrase it differently.
    3. If you don’t, you’re wasting time.
    4. Develop your genuine vocabulary
    5. Read excellent writers:
       1. CS Lewis
       2. Clive James
       3. George Orwell
       4. Jane Austen
       5. Listen to Stephen Fry
       6. Watch the Jerry Seinfeld doco ‘Comedian’ – note the attention he gives to every word.
13. Pray. Not for a long time, unless you sense it you should. (like) “Lord, I’m about to prepare a sermon. I feel like \*\*\*\*. But I thank you that you are God and you are there. Thank you for your righteous and radical love. Guide me know by your HS, preach to me now, soak my mind and heart in your revealed word. Help me to preach the gospel. But show me what aspect you want me to specifically say”.
14. Turn up early, and check technology
15. Don’t be boring. Be interesting. Shorter is best (if you go longer, you better be getting better and better)
16. The three things people expect at church:
    1. Connect authentically.
    2. Connect with God, feel it.
    3. Learn something interesting.
17. Volume doesn’t make things more interesting. People turn off from annoying constant noises (plane overhead).
18. Don’t use Christian jargon
    1. But you can use Biblical terms – just explain them.
    2. Always think about the new person.
    3. Don’t lie
19. Be clear. Be specific, don’t be vague
20. Move logically along, like it’s unfolding. Don’t let them get lost. You can tell them where you’re going. Help them develop a picture in their mind.
21. Practice saying things out loud. Don’t worry about the hype, re-phrase and re-phrase things so they have their own impact.
22. Conclusion: What is the appropriate response?
    1. Alter call
    2. Longer group prayer
    3. Song
    4. Just finish.
    5. Invitation to salvation (various ways)
23. Take Joy, but never Glory, in preaching
    1. Don’t make it about you.
    2. Don’t brag.
    3. Don’t elevate it over other ministry
24. Clean the toilets before and after preaching.
    1. See your sermon as a prayer, or a confession, before God.
    2. Kill my pride

And Craig Bailey has this advice:

1. Visualize your sermon
2. Use concrete examples
3. Use common language
4. Begin where they’re at
5. Keep illustrations brief and to the point
6. Hook onto everyday life experiences
7. Use repetition
8. Promote active listening
9. Work hard on your transitions
10. Lead to a specific action

**Activity: What I know and wonder about preaching**

Write down your 3 best preaching tips.

Write down the 3 things you find hardest in preaching.

Write down the 3 most pressing questions you have about preaching.

**Session 4: The Elements of Preaching**

**The Bible… and its authority in UCA preaching**

The Basis of Union, paragraph 4 (again):

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of the God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people’s attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.

And paragraph 5:

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church. The Uniting Church lays upon its members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, commits its ministers to preach from these and to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures.

There’s a subtle difference between the way the Basis of Union describes the ministry of preachers who are ordained and lay preachers…

**Principles of Biblical Interpretation**

“The movement of the Word to its congregation is accomplished through the interpretation of it.” (Bonhoeffer)

Selection of text to interpret – lectionary, season, series, circumstance or…?

Selection of translation

Reading the text rather than reading into the text

Reading the text in the context of the Bible as a whole

Reading the text as a witness to Jesus Christ

Reading the text as a word for today

Reading the text…for as long as possible; prayerfully, receptively

**An activity**: 2 things you like to do to help you interpret a biblical text for preaching; 2 things you find hard about interpreting a biblical text for preaching; 2 questions you have about preaching from the Bible…

**Session 5: Types of Preaching**

**Expository preaching**

* Verse by verse
* Thematic
* Narrative

**Topical preaching**

* Mothers’ Day
* ANZAC Day
* Weddings
* Funerals
* Baptism and the Lord’s Supper

**Dialogue sermons**

* Group Bible study
* Interview
* Interfaith dialogue
* Q&A

**Narrative Preaching**

* Stories, metaphors, analogies communicate truth; they don’t merely illustrate truth
* “Preaching is like taking the congregation on a long walk and leaving them to find their own way home”

**Godly Play**

* For children
* For adults

**Biblical storytelling**

* Reading
* Recitation
* Enactment

However you and I preach a message “controlled by the biblical witnesses”, we must do so *ethically*…