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LITURGICAL AND REFORMED: THE VARIETY AND CHALLENGE OF PREACHING THROUGHOUT THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION¹

John M. Linebarger

This article seeks to categorise different forms of Anglican preaching, highlighting the real breadth due to the Liturgical and Reformed context. Proposals are offered for varying strategies demanded by this range of forms, commending an application-driven, extemporaneous style.

Introduction

Because Anglicanism is both Liturgical and Reformed, the variety of sermons that an Anglican pastor is called upon to deliver is not only quite large, but possibly larger than in any other Christian tradition. Yet explicit seminary training in the breadth of these preaching forms is often lacking. As a new curate in a small Anglican parish in New Mexico,² I found myself singularly unprepared to preach the kinds of sermons that different occasions called for. My seminary training had prepared me to preach only a narrow range of those forms. I had previously served primarily in churches from the Reformed tradition, but I was now called upon to serve in a church that worshipped in a more liturgical tradition. As a result, I developed an intense interest in cultivating a set of preaching skills that would enable me to function effectively *throughout* the Anglican Communion.

Categories of Anglican Preaching Forms

During my curacy I developed a categorisation scheme of Anglican preaching forms, which is presented in Table 1. One characteristic of the table should be noted—each of the preaching forms is based *explicitly* on a Scripture text, and the *structure* of the sermon is governed by that text

¹ An earlier version of this article intended for a North American audience was posted online at <http://northamanglican.com/catholic-and-reformed/>. The input from Rev. Michael Kelshaw with regard to several of the details in this article is gratefully acknowledged.

² Church of Our Lord (<http://www.coolabq.org/>) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, is led by Fr. Harold Trott, who has been in ordained ministry for over fifty years.

in some way. Other preaching forms could have been listed in the table, such as narrative or redemptive-historical. However, they are neither as common nor as central as the forms listed. In the rest of this article I will explain my categories, describe each of the preaching forms in the table, and offer some suggestions about shaping and delivering the sermons in each category.

	Short	Medium	Long
Seasonal	Meditation / Devotional	Lectionary or Seasonal/ Holy Day Homily	Lectionary or Seasonal/Holy Day Sermon
Non- Seasonal	Meditation / Devotional	Occasional, Evangelistic, or Topical Homily	Occasional, Expository, Evangelistic, or Topical Sermon

Table 1: Categories of Anglican Preaching Forms

The two dimensions of Table 1 are “seasonality” (*i.e.*, sermon texts taken from the lectionary readings or inspired by the liturgical season), and length (short, medium, long). To link the table to the title of this article, seasonal sermon forms are generally associated with the Liturgical heritage of Anglicanism, whereas non-seasonal, expository, or evangelistic sermon forms are generally associated with Anglicanism’s Reformed or Evangelical heritage. By “short” I mean ten minutes or less; “medium” is standard homily length, often 18-22 minutes; and “long” is anywhere from 25 to 45 minutes. These length categories are the ones commonly found in practice. They are based on practical considerations, both logistical and psychological. Ten minutes or less is a good length for a devotional, as it allows sufficient time for a single striking thought or an emotional image to be absorbed by the audience. Homilies can perhaps be best conceived as one-point expositions; the homily length strikes a good balance between the time needed to communicate and illustrate that single point, and the need for brevity so that multiple worship services can be scheduled on a Sunday morning. Expository sermons generally cover the Scripture text in greater depth and contain a larger number of points (often three). The length of time allotted is a balance between the time needed for greater depth and the attention span of the congregation. Though expository sermon lengths are highly variable (they vary by country, and were much longer during earlier periods of Christian history), I generally shoot for

about 35 minutes, on the basis of the paedagogical rubric that “the mind cannot absorb what the seat cannot endure.”

Discussion of the Preaching Form Categories

Let me briefly discuss each preaching form in turn. I’ve placed meditations and devotionals in both seasonal and non-seasonal categories, since they can be occasioned by the liturgical calendar and by other events. For example, a common liturgical occasion for a series of meditations is a “Seven Last Words of Christ” service on Good Friday. Other occasions could include the opening of a Vestry meeting or a campfire service at the end of a High School youth group retreat. Meditations generally last for ten minutes or less, are more reflective and devotional than expositional and exegetical, and often aim at emotional impact. However, they *are* (or at least should be) based on a passage of Scripture. To increase the effectiveness of the communication event, meditations should consist of a single point or image, and perhaps be unified by a story. Meditations allow for considerable freedom and can be quite creative. For example, I once gave a meditation during a “Seven Last Words” service on Good Friday in the first person voice of a bystander on Golgotha looking up at Jesus on the cross, who laments that he too had shouted, “Crucify him!”

The homily form is the one generally associated with seasonal preaching, in particular the lectionary homily, which takes its sermon text from the lectionary readings for that Sunday. But the homily is technically an oral communication form, not necessarily a particular application of that form. As stated above, the homily can perhaps best be conceptualised as a one-point exposition that is communicated in a suitably small compass, generally about twenty minutes in length.³ Though other kinds of homily are possible, I have called out two common kinds of Anglican homilies in Table 1, the lectionary homily and the seasonal or Holy Day homily. Each will be described in order.

Several lectionaries are available from which to choose the texts for a lectionary homily. Authorised Books of Common Prayer often contain a lectionary as part of the front or back matter; modern versions of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) actually contain two such “Tables of Lessons.” The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) has released two lectionaries, one for the Daily Office and one for Sundays and Red-

³ Its brevity makes a homily not only suitable for a Eucharistic service, especially when multiple services are scheduled on a Sunday morning, but also for Morning and Evening Prayer services.

Letter Days.⁴ Rev. Michael Fry has created a particularly novel lectionary that covers the entire Bible.⁵ Technically, most of these lectionaries are Daily Office lectionaries that follow a one-year cycle, but the readings for Sunday can be chosen as sermon texts.⁶ Both the 1662 BCP and the American 1928 BCP contain Epistle and Gospel readings (called the Proper) in the main body of the prayer book for each Sunday in the liturgical year; these are the ones generally read during the service of Holy Communion. The general trend of modern prayer books is to include a Sunday lectionary with four readings which follows a three-year cycle, and (if provided) a Daily Office lectionary that follows a two-year cycle. For example, the American 1979 BCP, the South African 1989 BCP, the West Indies 1995 BCP, the 1995 *A Prayer Book for Australia*, and the 2004 BCP from Northern Ireland fall into this category.⁷

Numerous structural options exist for a lectionary homily. The default is to preach a single point from the Gospel reading, but I recommend the exploration of other choices, to vary the text and texture for the sake of the hearers. For example, Prof. Jack Gabig of Trinity School for Ministry in Pennsylvania is fond of preaching from the Psalm reading. Since the compilers of a lectionary generally package readings together on the basis of one or more thematic similarities, a powerful way to structure a lectionary homily is to pick one of the readings that exhibits a particular theme as the sermon text, and weave in one or more of the other lectionary readings that follow the same theme during the course of the homily. The theme, of course, forms the single point for the homily.

Additional structural options are available, and form something of a continuum. At one end of the continuum is to preach from *all* of the texts in the lectionary readings, ideally by drawing a common theme from each of them instead of just trotting through them in rote order. At the other end of the continuum is to preach from *one* of the texts in the lectionary readings, without reference to any of the other lectionary readings. Sometimes the latter is done by extracting multiple points from the text, not just one, as a kind of expository sermon in miniature. However, each of the points should be unified in some way so that the homily forms a coherent communication event in the mind of the listener.

⁴ http://anglicanchurch.net/?/main/texts_for_common_prayer

⁵ <http://www.pricejh.com/readingplan/plans/frylectionary.pdf>

⁶ The American 1928 BCP contains up to three sets of Sunday lessons to choose from for each Office.

⁷ Some modern prayer books, such as the 2008 *Our Modern Services* from the Anglican Church of Kenya, include no lectionary at all.

Behind any categorisation scheme lurks the question of paedogogy. How does someone *learn* how to preach an effective lectionary homily? This was a gap in my own training; I was schooled to preach an expository sermon, not a lectionary homily, and had to learn how to do so on the job during my curacy. Unlike expository preaching, I was initially unable to identify any classic texts on lectionary preaching. It was only during the writing of this article that the book *Elements of Homiletic: A Method of Preparing to Preach* by O. C. Edwards, Jr, was recommended to me as a modern classic.⁸ So I learned over time simply by listening to a wide variety of Anglican homilists, both in person and online. I found the homilies of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey of Clifton (George Carey), particularly timely and instructive. He visited New Mexico for a lecture series, and preached in several churches during his stay. Bit by bit I picked up how to preach a lectionary homily by modelling and induction. For me, at least, how to preach a homily was caught, not taught.

Another kind of homily is a seasonal or Holy Day homily. The set of seasonal and Holy Days is listed in the Prayer Book, but common seasonal days for a homily include Christmas Day, Epiphany, Baptism of Jesus, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Easter Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. Holy Days include the Annunciation to Mary, the Transfiguration, and All Saints' Day. Such homilies tend to be more theological in nature, in keeping with the seasonal theme of the day. Ideally, a text would be chosen (or selected from the lectionary readings) that would allow a topical sermon on the theme of the day to emerge from an exposition of the sermon text.⁹

The final column in the Seasonal row of the table, "Lectionary or Seasonal/Holy Day Sermon," can be mentioned briefly in anticipation of a fuller discussion of expository sermons in the Non-Seasonal row. Since both homilies and sermons are simply oral communication forms with different lengths and structures, it is entirely possible to preach a lectionary sermon (or even a lectionary exposition) instead of a lectionary homily, and to preach a Seasonal/Holy Day sermon as well. Note that to some degree, the categories in Table 1 blend together and are not mutually

⁸ O. C. Edwards, Jr., *Elements of Homiletic: A Method of Preparing to Preach* (Collegetown, MN: Pueblo Books, 1990).

⁹ This recommendation stands in contrast to another approach to topical or thematic sermons, in which the sermon text consists of *multiple* texts scattered throughout the Bible. This approach is much less desirable because its Scriptural control is weaker, since both the sermon texts and the points derived from them are chosen and controlled by the preacher.

exclusive. For example, homilies can be structured expositively, and sermons can be based on the lectionary readings.

Non-seasonal homilies can be inspired by a number of occasions, from personal (weddings, funerals, celebrations of life, baptisms, confirmations, church membership) to national. National occasions naturally vary by nation, but include Anniversary of the Day of the Accession of the Reigning Sovereign (England, Scotland, Canada), Dominion Day (Canada), Remembrance Day (Canada), Bible Sunday (Northern Ireland, Kenya), Independence Day (USA) and Thanksgiving (USA, Canada). They can be thematic or topical, but ideally controlled by a single passage of Scripture.¹⁰ And they can be evangelistic, which needs a few words of explanation.

All preaching should be evangelistic in the sense that all sermons should point the congregation to Christ, who is the meta-narrative not only of Scripture but also of Time and Eternity. But some preaching is *explicitly* evangelistic, aimed straight at a lost world for the express purpose of leading them to Christ, by exposing the Bad News of sin and rebellion and the Good News of redemption in Jesus. This kind of sermon is often delivered outside of the church, directly to the target audience in a location that is much closer to where it actually lives.

How can one learn how to preach an evangelistic sermon? A good starting place is the embedded sermons in the Book of Acts. Then study the sermons of famous evangelists such as George Whitefield, John Wesley, D. L. Moody, and Billy Graham.¹¹ A book of particularly useful models is *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon* by D. M. Lloyd-Jones.¹² Modern-day Anglican exemplars include Canon Michael Green; Rico Tice, the evangelist at All Souls Langham Place in London; and John Chapman and John Dickson in the Diocese of Sydney.

Moving on to sermon-length communication forms, the only subcategory that has not yet been examined in detail is the expository sermon. Expository sermons are generally based on a single text, consist of multiple points (traditionally three) that are unified in some way, are often based on a study of the original languages, and are of greater length and depth than a homily. It is quite common for an expository sermon

¹⁰ A particularly Anglican topical sermon series is one on the articles of the Creeds (either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed), or on the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion.

¹¹ A riveting series of Billy Graham crusade videos can be found on YouTube.

¹² D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1983).

series to be preached through an entire book of the Bible. In Anglican contexts this is known as *lectio continua*, and is generally practiced during the many Sundays after Trinity in place of lectionary preaching. Though some proponents of expository preaching insist that this form of preaching is superior to all others,¹³ in my own view this ignores both the variety of the preaching forms in the Bible itself as well as the preaching forms practiced throughout the history of the Church. However, a good case can be made that expository preaching enforces a stronger control mechanism than other preaching forms, since the structure and points are controlled by the text itself instead of by the potentially arbitrary or idiosyncratic choices of the preacher.

Expository preaching is the preaching form most commonly taught in seminaries, especially Reformed or Evangelical seminaries. Expository preaching forms the base for all other forms of preaching, for several reasons: its method is the most rigorous; it takes the most time to learn properly; and most other sermon forms can be conceptualised as variants. My own experience leads me to believe that it is easier to have learned exposition in seminary and picked up homily preaching on the job than to have acquired those skills the other way around. So how best to learn expository preaching, short of a formal seminary course?¹⁴ Modern classic texts abound, such as *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chapell,¹⁵ *Preaching and Preachers* by D. M. Lloyd-Jones,¹⁶ and *Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson.¹⁷ The Proclamation Trust¹⁸ is an organisation with Anglican roots whose purpose is to promote biblical exposition; they have numerous resources and sermon examples online. And how best to learn *Anglican* preaching? Drink deep from great preachers throughout

¹³ This view is particularly associated with John MacArthur of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, and The Master's Seminary. See John MacArthur, Jr., et al., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1992).

¹⁴ A complete course on Expository Preaching from The Master's Seminary is available on YouTube starting at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jCyfWwz3-Y>.

¹⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). BiblicalTraining offers a Preaching course by Dr. Chapell for free at <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/group/course/3139>.

¹⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971).

¹⁷ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

¹⁸ <https://www.proctrust.org.uk/>

Anglican history, including Hugh Latimer, Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne, George Whitefield, Charles Simeon, John Wesley, Edward Pusey, J. C. Ryle, John Stott, Dick Lucas, Christopher Ash, Thad Barnum, and John Guernsey.

Storytelling

Storytelling is an entry that I could have made in each of the cells in Table 1, but chose not to because it is somewhat idiosyncratic and not very common in Anglican contexts. An extended story can be used in a variety of lengths on both seasonal and non-seasonal occasions, such that it can stand in for meditations, homilies, and even sermons. The key is that the story is crafted such that not only is it *based* on a particular text of Scripture, but it also *expounds* that text of Scripture as the story unfolds. For example, I have created a story series with a continuing mythical character, a certain Dave Williams, who is the rector of Christ-in-the-Valley Anglican Church in Medio de la Nada, New Mexico.¹⁹ Some of the stories are meditation length, while others are homily and sermon length. Though some might object that such stories are not “preaching the Word” in the traditional sense, I would counter that in terms of *retention* of the Word by the congregation, stories are often superior to other preaching forms. Jesus himself did a considerable amount of preaching in parables, which are a special kind of story. And because biblical truth is proclaimed through images, and indirectly instead of didactically, stories are also very effective communication mechanisms for children, for postmodern adults, and in cultures with a long tradition of storytelling.

Model of Preaching

A few brief suggestions about the preaching event follow. I am personally disturbed by the kind of preaching that can best be described as a bulk information transfer from the mind of the preacher to the minds of the congregation. If that information transfer is reasonably complete and undistorted, then the sermon is deemed a success and the preacher’s work is done. All else is left as an exercise for the hearer, albeit guided by the Holy Spirit. I find that conception of preaching very difficult to reconcile with James 1:22–25, in which the purpose of the encounter with the

¹⁹ A collection of Father Dave stories and story sermons, including a sermon that develops a biblical theology of story, can be found on SoundCloud at <https://soundcloud.com/jmlineb>.

Word is to *obey* it, not just to *hear* it. The implication is that the work of the preacher is not done until his congregation is challenged to apply the Word and change their behaviour. The goal of the preaching event is to influence *behaviour*, not just to enlighten the *mind*. The mind is the starting point, but right behaviour is the desired end result. This is not to advocate a crass moralism in which the Christian life is reduced to a set of rules. Instead, the sermon should provide an occasion for the congregation to encounter the crucified and risen Christ through the exposition of God's written revelation. But it is part of the preacher's responsibility to address the *behavioural* implications of that encounter with Christ, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit those implications can be recognised, internalised, and actualised by the congregation. The figure below depicts a model of preaching that moves from the mind to the will to behaviour.

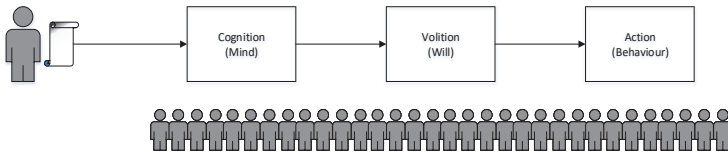


Figure: Model of Preaching

G. Campbell Morgan recognised the vital importance of moving beyond cognition in these immortal words: “The preacher should never address a crowd without remembering his ultimate citadel is the citadel of the human will. He may travel along the line of the emotions, but he is after the will. He may approach along the line of the intellect, but he is after the will.”²⁰ I have been quite influenced by the way that Tim Keller inverts the process of sermon preparation by making it application-driven and outcome-oriented from the very outset. His lectures at Oak Hill College in London on the topic of “Preaching to the Heart” form an excellent introduction to this approach.²¹

One other observation. I have heard too many sermons that are nothing more than running commentaries on the text, with offhand

²⁰ G. Campbell Morgan, *Preaching* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1937), 13.

²¹ http://www.oakhill.ac.uk/people/tim_keller.html. Rev. Keller also taught a workshop on “Preaching to the Heart” at the 2015 National Conference of The Gospel Coalition (TGC); a video is available for download on Vimeo at <https://vimeo.com/125797573>.

observations made along the way. No attempt was made to unify or organise the presentation, in order to make the sermon a coherent form of oral communication. The confusion seems to be between the acts of preaching and teaching. Preaching is *not* the same thing as teaching, although a sermon might have a teaching component. Preaching structures each communication event such that it is unified and in some sense stands alone; teaching often picks up right where the last event left off. Teaching stops at the mind, while preaching drills down to behaviour. Perhaps most significantly, teachers teach concepts, but preachers preach images.²²

Delivery

Finally, a suggestion about delivery. A certain kind of sermon or homily has a long tradition among Anglicans, in which the sermon is crafted as if it were a literary event. Such a sermon often begins with a quote, ends with a poem or a hymn, and is sprinkled throughout with quotations and literary references. The sermon is delivered by reading from a manuscript in the pulpit. While this particular sermon form might have been effective in the nineteenth century—and it was not uncommon for such sermons to be collected and published—I contend that its effectiveness is diminished in the twenty-first century because it can be perceived as an anachronism, a sterile, read literary event instead of a fresh, oral communication event. By contrast, extemporaneous preaching allows the preacher to make extended eye contact with his congregation, and to dynamically adjust the sermon in the moment. And it rivets the congregation and gives them the sense that “he’s preaching right to *me!*”

I strongly recommend that Anglican preachers cultivate an extemporaneous preaching style and speak directly to their congregations without the mediation (and barrier) of a manuscript. And I say this as someone who for almost a decade preached from a manuscript, which I clung to like a safety blanket. It was only when a medical condition prevented me from using a computer for an extended period of time that I was thrust into the brave new world of extemporaneous preaching, of approaching the pulpit with only my Bible and the Greek text in hand (well, sometimes with an index card tucked into my Bible too).

How can someone make the transition to extemporaneous preaching? The most straightforward way, and a good first step, is to memorise a sermon manuscript. That removes the barrier, but the preacher must take

²² This was a favorite saying of Dr. Gordon Fee when I was his student at Regent College.

care that it does not come across to the congregation as a memorised speech. The goal state is truly extemporaneous delivery straight from the text. Toward this goal I have had a handful of good mentors and exemplars, especially the retired bishop of the Rio Grande who preached the sermon at both of my ordination services, the late Terence Kelshaw. I asked his son Michael how he did it, and Michael speculated that he “hid the sermon in the text” somehow. That is precisely the approach that is currently working for me. Certain key sentences in the text serve as if they were sermon points on an index card, and function as hooks with which to retrieve all of the predigested material that I have stored in my brain under that point. In using this approach, be careful to associate sentences and clauses in the text with your introduction, conclusion, transitions,²³ and applications as well, so that they are smoothly retrieved. And beware a tendency to preach too long, since the length is no longer controlled by a manuscript, so make judicious (and surreptitious) use of a clock.

Conclusion

Though all true preaching should be faithful to the text on which it is based, the Scriptures come to us embedded in concentric circles of context. For example, a psalm had an original context at the time it was composed, an enclosing context within one of the five books of Psalms, and canonical contexts as part of the Writings (*Kethubim*), the Old Testament, and the canon of Scripture, respectively. Each circle of context imparts a layer of meaning, which should inform the sermon in some way. But the outermost context of Scripture—its final canonical context—shapes its function in the revelation of redemption, and that revelation always points us to Christ. As a result, each sermon is incomplete unless it also connects the text to Christ, and to the claim of the gospel on our lives.

The implication for the theme of this article is clear. Good Anglican preaching in particular, and good Christian preaching in general, is always a triumph of content over form. When the Apostle Paul spoke of “the foolishness of preaching” (1 Corinthians 1:21), he was referring not to the foolishness of the preaching form *per se*, but instead to how its substance, its core content, was perceived by the outside world. Jesus Christ has ever been a *skandalon* in the eyes of the world, a stumbling block to the unregenerate mind and an impediment to uncontrolled behaviour. Yet it is only the freedom and reconciliation unleashed by that

²³ In my experience, coherent transitions are just as important in sustaining listener attention as coherent sermon points.

scandalous event, the ignominious sacrificial death of the Son of God on the cross of a common criminal, that can heal the ruinous aftermath of unfettered behaviour and actualise deep human needs for relationship and wholeness.

Regardless of form, may all our sermons trace the trajectory from *skandalon* to Good News, such that Christ and him crucified are exalted before the congregation. May our congregations always respond not with “What a wonderful preacher!” but instead with “What a wonderful God!”

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