

between the message and the actual people, places or events which are familiar to all of us here in this place, today. Sermons which fail to do this may faithfully expound the word of God (which should be our primary aim) but just sound like a piece of ancient history.

9 Afterthought

It is possible Jesus sometimes added a sentence as an afterthought to his parables which would have a lasting effect on the hearers. One obvious example can be found in John 8.7 – 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' It was certainly an effective final remark.

A barrister called Edward Marshall Hall was once defending a poor prostitute who had been unjustly accused of murder. After he had finished summing up his case to the jury (who were to decide whether or not she was guilty), he sat down – but immediately stood up again, pointed to the woman and challenged them, 'Look at her, gentlemen, look at her. Life never gave her a chance; won't you?' The verdict was 'Not guilty'.

10 Pause

Clearly in 9, above, the speakers made good use of a pause. We can learn a lot about 'timing' of this nature if we listen carefully to professional actors and comedians. Pauses should be used quite often. If a major point has been made, a challenge issued or a question asked, it will help the listeners if they are given a few moments to digest what has been said before having to listen to the next point. Preachers must always be thinking how the listeners are likely to respond in their minds to what has been said. In some places – e.g. in Africa, in black churches in USA or in inner-city congregations in the UK – people will shout out if you ask them a question. But others will think that it is their place to sit quietly in church and just listen obediently to the preacher, however little they understand or like it! In that case, you can ask them what they really think – and then give them time to think, or even to discuss it with their neighbour. On many topics, the thoughts of the people may actually be more reliable than those of the preacher – and wise is the preacher who recognizes this. Pauses show that you do. Martin Luther King Jr, in his 'dream' speech, below, paused not before his phrase, 'I have a dream' (as you would expect), but after it, each time. The pause made the phrase belong to the preceding sentence, and drew emotional responses from the crowd. It was an odd place to pause, but it worked.

11 Gestures

It is important to use your eyes, hands and facial expressions to convey your meaning. There are no rules about this – you will

need a listener to tell you if, for example, you are making the same gesture repeatedly, and probably meaninglessly. If you are using sermon notes, you can add emphasis to a point by leaning forward and making eye-contact with the congregation. If you wear spectacles, take them off sometimes, or use them in a gesture. You do not need always to hide your notes – you can use them in gestures, as Winston Churchill often did.

Four speeches are reproduced below as examples of many of these stylistic features which help to make the message more effective. The Study Suggestions will help you to analyse these features and reflect on how they are used.

Winston Churchill, 1938

I will begin by saying the most unpopular and unwelcome thing: that we have suffered a total and unmitigated defeat. The utmost that my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister has been able to secure by all his immense exertions at Munich and elsewhere (*interruptions*) . . . the most that he has been able to gain for Czechoslovakia is that the German dictator

instead of snatching his victuals from the table
has been content to have them served to him
course by course.

For you will find in a matter of months that Czechoslovakia will be engulfed by the Nazi regime. Her frontier fortresses are already in German hands – something which France and Britain will bitterly regret when Herr Hitler chooses to look westward.

Silent, mournful,
abandoned, broken,

Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness. That is the most grievous result of what we have left undone for the last five years;

five years of looking for the line of least resistance,
five years of uninterrupted retreat,
five years of neglect of our air defences.

The British people should know
that we have suffered a defeat
without a war,

that we have passed an awful milestone in our history when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged, and

that these terrible words have been pronounced
against the Western democracies;
'Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting'.

And don't suppose this is the end.
This is only the beginning of the reckoning.

This is only the first sip, the first foretaste
of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us
year by year . . .

Unless . . .
unless, by a supreme recovery of martial vigour,
we arise again and take our stand for freedom!

Martin Luther King, 1963

Dr King's speeches were repeatedly interrupted by the huge crowd with exclamations and applause. He was identifying with the people and speaking not so much to them, as for them. Only a sample of these interruptions is given below.

I have a dream
that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons
of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table
of brotherhood.

I have a dream
that even the state of Mississippi – a state sweltering with the heat of
oppression, sweltering with the heat of injustice (*Yeah! Yeah!*) – will
be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice (*Amen, Amen*).

I have a dream
that my four little children (*Amen! Yeah! Yeah!*) will one day be able to
live in a nation where they are not judged by the colour of their skin
but by the content of their character (*applause, Amen! Amen!*).

I have a dream.

I have a dream
that one day little black boys and little black girls will be able to join
hands with little white boys and little white girls as sisters and
brothers.

I have a dream today.
. . . This will be the day when all God's children will be able to sing
with new meaning,
My country, 'tis of thee

Sweet land of liberty
Of thee I sing.

Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrim's pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring!

And if America is to become a great nation, this must become true.
So let freedom ring!

From the prodigious hills of New Hampshire let freedom ring!
From the mighty mountains of New York let freedom ring!
From the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania let freedom ring!
From the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado let freedom ring!
From the curvaceous slopes of California . . .
But not only that: let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia;
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee;
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi;
From every mountainside let freedom ring!

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we
let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and
every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's
children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants
and Catholics – will be able to join hands in the words of that old
Negro spiritual:

Free at last,
Free at last,
Thank God Almighty
We're free at last!

Martin Luther King, 1968

. . . and he's allowed me to go up to the mountain top (*Go ahead!*)
and I've looked over (*Yeah!*)
and I've seen the promised land. (*Holy! Holy! Amen!*)
I may not get there with you,
but I want you to know tonight that we as a people
will get to the promised land.
So I'm happy tonight.
I'm not worried.
I'm not fearing any man –
mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!

(The next day, Dr King was shot dead.)

Allan Boesak, 1990

We see the tears on the cheeks of those who have buried loved ones
who have died in the struggle, and we share their grief,
and we know the price is high, but the end is near.
We see at this moment justice still stumbling on the streets of South
Africa, and apartheid still reigning on the throne of this land,
and we know the price is high, but the end is near.
We hear the voices of the beast as it shouts at us, as it tries to frighten
us, as it tries to intimidate us,
and we know the price is high, but the end is near.
We know, we know that we will have to pay, and it is costly, and the
struggle is long and hard, and the road is arduous,
the price is high, but the end is near.
Do not despair, do not look around, do not betray our faith, do not
betray our children, do not betray our fathers, do not betray our
mothers, do not betray our vision, do not betray the justice we are
fighting for, do not betray the land we will see, that will rise up out
of the ashes of this country, as apartheid will crumble to dust.
The price will be high, but the end is near.
Hear me, le Grange, hear me, P. W. Botha; hear me also, O my
people. Leave this church today strengthened and strong and faithful
and clear in your own minds.
The price is high, but the end is near.

The Dangers of Rhetoric

The purpose of including the above quotations is that they contain many stylistic features which preachers can use effectively at any time, provided they do so only occasionally. However, most of these speeches were delivered to large crowds at times of danger or challenge. It was necessary for the speakers to stir the emotions and wills of the people by using a declamatory (formal, oratorical) style, which would not be appropriate for the normal Sunday sermon in an ordinary local church. It would normally be unwise to fill one's sermon with such strong rhetoric. A conversational style would be more effective. Style depends partly on the nature of the message and partly on the number of people present. Another obvious danger is that listeners will admire the preacher so much that they will never get the message about following Jesus in obedient discipleship. Watching Dr King's speech on TV, President Kennedy exclaimed, 'Magnificent!' and the BBC reporter said that Dr Boesak spoke with the voice of angels. For this reason, many gifted speakers have made a conscious decision to simplify their style when

preaching and to give up using rhetorical skills – so that Jesus may be seen, not the preacher (see the quotation from Baxter on p. 50).

In any case, the New Testament, unlike the Qur'an and much of the Old Testament, was not written in a beautiful literary style or in a sacred language but in *koine* Greek – the language of the street and the marketplace – and our preaching should reflect not only the content but also the forms which Jesus and the apostles used (see p. 102).

There is also a theological reason for not relying too much on rhetorical skill. This is based on 1 Corinthians 1.18–2.5. Even though he knew that the citizens of Corinth admired rhetoric, Paul refused to use this skill because he also knew that the effectiveness of Christian preaching comes from the power of God's message, not on the skill of the preacher to persuade (or even brainwash!) the hearer (Thiselton, 2000:107f.). Paul's 'word of the cross' not only says something. Like the word of the Lord through the prophets, it also *does* something – it creates faith in those who hear it, and changes them (Romans 1.16; 1 Corinthians 2.4, 5). The popular newspaper, *The Times* of London, runs a competition to find the 'best' sermons of the year. But this is a misplaced exercise. It forgets that true sermons belong to one time and one place and cannot be effective outside the setting for which they were prepared. And you cannot truly assess the merits of a Christian sermon unless you were in that place. In the words of Leander Keck: 'Paul saw (in 1 Cor. 1.28, 29; 4.20; 2 Cor. 4.7) that you can't justify the preacher or the message by the norms of the culture without surrendering the message of the cross' (Keck, 1978:53). Those who seek credit for good performance end up either proclaiming themselves or offering 'another Jesus'. The extracts given in this chapter were speeches rather than sermons, aimed at political action for justice rather than spiritual commitment to Christ.

St Augustine compared the skills of preaching with the skills of rhetoric. Preachers, he wrote, should first pray that God gives the message. Second, they should make the quality of the content and the welfare of the hearers more important than the outward form. Third, their words should be clearly understood. But he recognized that sermons should be not only instructive but also enjoyable to listen to.

Scripture has to take seriously the role of culture in dealing with issues that affect society, and particularly women.

- 4 Story-telling is a significant method of preaching, especially by women, in areas where the Bible is largely told as a story rather than read, because of high levels of illiteracy. This method also has advantages because of the nature of stories in Africa.

A substantial body of African stories are gender neutral. Stories do not always feature men and women or girls and boys. Instead, they might feature animals whose biological gender is not specified. The story thus manages, to some degree, to pass wisdom and values indiscriminately to its listeners. African stories also carry 'flat' characters, e.g. the hare in South and East Africa, or the spider in West Africa, which represent values and philosophies of survival. (Dube, 2001:3)

Story-telling as a method of preaching lessens the problem of language and gender stereotyping. A story in this case can be used to warn, to send a disciplinary message, to instil morality or to affirm people. This method is significant in the African Instituted Churches, most of which were founded by women. When they preach they invoke the same Spirit who came upon the women of old. This helps to explain why they are preachers and leaders. It is a way of confronting patriarchal churches and societies which have denied them opportunities to preach. Although many stories in the Scriptures are negative towards women, these preachers capitalize on the stories which are liberating to all.

- 5 Women use a social analysis or prophetic method of preaching. They engage with issues and situations of struggle for social justice, including gender justice. Most women preachers will name the issues or expose the deceptive forces in our world that seek to imprison and oppress. These forces take the form of systems, powerful people, language and ideologies which are death-producing for us. At other times, these forces are internalized and people are trapped by their own thinking, deceived into denying their own value as human beings. I have to add that men, especially church leaders in Kenya, have also used this method. They have been good at confronting powers that affect them, but I would argue they have not concerned themselves with gender issues, especially those which affect women.
- 6 The use of metaphor is central in women's preaching, including things like voice, story, actions, etc. Each metaphor is an integral part of the human experience of emotions, thought, speech and actions. It is a way of knowing that expands our understanding of reality, and enables us to see something new by referring to something familiar. Women's preaching does not need to imitate male preaching or

screaming male voices, but rather to opt for imaginative ways of presenting the word of God to change people's lives for the better.

The struggle for women is not to be like men in preaching, even if their training takes place under patriarchal (male-dominated) norms. Women who preach should not have to seek to be accepted, but do need to think critically about their preaching, the stories they use, their actions, voices, themes and how they characterize women in their sermons. The sermons should be designed to challenge people to move well beyond the limitations that have been placed on them in the past. They can do so by listening more intently to the voice of God and learning to trust their own voices.

Preaching is liberation. We speak to set people free . . . There can be no redemption of the self without a liberation of the social world, and no redemption of the social world without release from the self's inner bondage. All we are saying is that preaching, as it shares God's saving purpose, will be a liberating word. (Buttrick, 1994)

When preaching leads to the community's expression of vision and hope, it has announced good news.

Study Suggestions

- 1 Name any public speakers you have heard whose rhetorical skills have impressed you, whether or not you agree with what they say. Try to analyse what makes them effective.
- 2 What three other rhetorical devices, apart from 'puzzle', do you notice in the two quotations from Churchill on pp. 83-4?
- 3 (a) In each example given on p. 84, what are the words of the refrain?
(b) What device did Dr King use in 1963 (p. 89) which was similar to that used by Amos?
- 4 Sometimes a foreign word, or phrase, is used in the Bible (e.g. the Egyptian word used in Genesis 41.43). Can you think of any others? What effect do you think it has on the reader?
- 5 How did Dr King and Dr Boesak make links between their message and the concrete situation confronting the people at that time?
- 6 Read the four speeches on pp. 87-90 several times and identify or underline all the rhetorical devices used by the speakers. Imagine the effect this way of speaking had on those who were listening.
- 7 Can you think of any other rhetorical devices which you have heard speakers using? In what situations, if any, might such devices help you to get your message across?