

Perspectives on preaching (in building up missional churches)

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Preaching is considered to be a core ministry in building up local congregations. Within the Reformed tradition this is even truer. The researcher has, over years, tried to discern certain core 'qualities' of preachers and principles for preaching that will accomplish building local congregations into missional units. Assuming that preachers are serious about leading congregations towards true missionality, the article attempted to focus on a few of these core criteria for both preacher and preaching. In doing so, the article drew mainly on the wisdom of well-known preachers in the USA, wisdom that will be used to guide the researcher's future empirical study of preaching in the South African context. Prof. Müller, who is honoured in this Festschrift, wrote his DD thesis on preaching and I hope that this will reconnect his current work to his original research.

Introduction

Julian Müller's first academic steps were in preaching. He wrote his doctoral thesis in homiletics (1983). One of his first books published (1988) was on liturgy. He most probably would have become the next professor in homiletics and liturgy. When his colleague in the Department decided to specialise in these fields, Julian started his now well-known research in pastoral care and narrative theology. When the manuscript for *Die Erediens as Fees* (1988) was submitted, I was asked to review the manuscript for the publisher. I was impressed with the manuscript, but even more so with his sensitive understanding of worship and preaching. I sometimes cannot but wonder what he would have produced could he continue to build on his doctoral work.

My personal relationship with Julian goes back to a morning in a café in Church Street in the late seventies. He was then called to become a student pastor in Universiteitsoord where I had been a few years earlier. We had a good discussion and my advice was: you have to go there. Since then we have worked together in many ways. I was part of the Department of Practical Theology when he did his doctoral exams. I followed his career and was then privileged to work with him in my capacity as Director of the Centre for Contextual Ministry, with him as a member of the Executive of the Advisory Board overseeing the programme. As head of the department of Practical Theology, he opened doors for me to slide back into my academic role when the Centre relocated from Vista University to the University of Pretoria on 01 January 2002.

A very personal memory concerns his consistent sense for justice when he challenged a very inconsistent decision by a presbytery and moderamen concerning my re-admission to full time ministry. I will always be grateful towards him for his willingness to be an advocate on my behalf. Suffice to say how great an honour it is for me to participate in this Festschrift. Not only is he a friend, but a deeply appreciated colleague in Practical Theology. I sincerely hope that this short contribution will honour a friend who certainly did not lose his love for preaching and his ability to preach. The few times that I could listen to him, I could not help but think how his research on the *homily* as a form of preaching linked up with his current research on narrative theology.

My reason for this article is the research question that has kept me busy since I started to work in the field of *Gemeindeaufbau* or Congregational Studies: what kind of preaching and preacher will, in their public role of preaching, help a local congregation make sense of its missional identity? My current research focuses once again on the process(es) of change in congregations on the journey of being and becoming missional. In this article I will draw heavily on two sources: Carl (2009) and Duduit (1996). My reason is the research behind the two sources, which shed light on my research question. The discerning principles (which I use here as headings) are my choices. I arrived at them over the years and especially during my research for *Ek is die Verskil: Die invloed van persoonlikheid in die prediking* (Nel 2005a).

Within the methodological approach proposed by Osmer (2008), I can only deal, and even this only in part, with the research movement Osmer (2008:4, 129–174) identifies with the question

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‘what ought to be going on?’ In follow up research, I plan to work with a homiletician in South Africa in an empirical project on ‘what is going on and why is it going on?’ Only then will one be able to make observations on a way forward – Osmer’s (2008:4, 175–218) ‘pragmatic task’.

Understanding the missional local church

To begin, it is necessary to briefly state my understanding of a missional church, even though I have done so recently elsewhere (Nel 2009, 2011). Since Guder *et al.*, ‘missional’ is widely accepted as a new concept in and of itself, not only as a synonym for missionary, becoming the preferred term over missionary (cf. Guder 1998:6). One reason for this is because even the concept ‘missionary’ reminds too much of the old paradigm where a church can be totally absorbed with its own issues but still have an outreach programme or two in the world – even having missionaries out in the field. A basic change is the understanding that the church does not conduct missions. The church is in mission. It is God’s mission to the world. The church is either *missional* or it is not a church at all: ‘In other words, the church’s true and authentic organizing principle is mission. Therefore when the church is in mission, it is the true church’ (Hirsch & Catchim 2012:xix; cf. also Newbigin 1995:2).

Quotes from three key participants in the so-called missional conversation may help me make the point. Firstly, Zscheile (2012; cf. Dearborn 1998) describes it as follows:

At the heart of the missional church conversation lies a challenge: to recover and deepen the church’s Christian identity in a post-Christendom world in light of the triune God’s mission in all of creation ... What is ‘missional’: The missional church conversation started with a recognition that the church’s relationship to its surrounding culture in the West had changed: the era of functional Christendom or a church culture was over, and the primary source of the church’s identity and vocation could no longer rest on social centrality. By ‘missional church’ I mean a church whose identity lies in its *participation in the triune God’s mission* in all of creation. In the view of missional ecclesiology, it is God’s mission that has a church, not the church that has a mission. Missional church views church as definitive of what the church is as a *product of and participant in* God’s mission. (pp. 1, 5–6)

Secondly, Anthony Gittins (2008) wrote:

Missional is an adjective; applied to Christianity or to individual Christians it describes a lifestyle that is specifically and intentionally exocentric rather than endocentric, boundary breaking rather than boundary maintaining ... Missional Christianity is Beyond Belief [*with reference to a dogmatic approach*]. We identify ourselves in terms of our embodiment or incarnation ... Missional Christianity implies an ongoing process: Missional Christianity is a lived experience rather than a fixed attitude or patterns of set behavior. (pp. 46, 47, 48)

With reference to the Roman Catholic worship service that ends with ‘*Ita! Missa est!*: Go on your way now; you are sent forth’ and with reference to 1 Corinthians 4: 15 and 2 Corinthians 9:12, Gittins (2008) writes:

This notion of eucharist as grace and thanksgiving (and the requirement that it extend or be shared as widely as possible) should surely be at the heart of every Christian life, just as it was the leitmotif, the defining characteristic of the life of Jesus. (p. 69)

It becomes our life, as his quote from St Teresa of Ávila confirms:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours;
No hands but yours; no feet but yours;
Yours are the eyes through which
Christ’s compassion is to look out into the world
Yours are the feet with which
He is to go about doing good;
Yours are the hands with which
He is to bless us now. (in Gittens 2008:69)

Thirdly, in his extensive research and writings on the subject in the missional conversation, Van Gelder (2007) wrote:

The missional church conversation brings together two streams of understanding God’s work in the world. First, God has a mission within all creation – the *missio Dei*. Second, God brought redemption to bear on all of life within creation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the Kingdom of God ... A missional understanding of God’s work in the world from this perspective is framed as follows: God is seeking to bring his kingdom, the redemptive reign of God in Christ, to bear on every dimension of life within all the world so that the larger creation purposes of God can be fulfilled – the *missio Dei*. The missional understanding has the world as its primary horizon and the church is placed at the center of the activity in relating the kingdom of God to the *missio Dei*. The church’s self-understanding as being missional is grounded in the work of the Spirit of God, who calls the church into existence as a gathered community, equips and prepares it, and sends it into the world to participate fully in God’s mission. (p. 85)

It is impossible to miss the shift in ecclesiological thinking from being primarily Christological to honouring the Spirit to Trinitarian (cf. especially Volf 1998; Zizioulas 2007). The church is the plan of the Triune God to bring healing and restoration in his world. It is worth noting that almost all of the notable authors in this conversation refer to Newbigin (1953, 1963, 1978, 1989, 1995; cf. also Goheen 2000 on Newbigin’s ecclesiology) and Bosch (1991) in working out their own arguments.

In 1991, already, Bosch (1991:390) wrote: ‘There is church because there is mission, not vice versa.’ This is my understanding of being and becoming missional. It is a process of reformation whereby the local church rediscovers and seriously seeks to live by its God-given identity. However difficult it is to describe this identity, and it is, developing a missional church cannot avoid or bypass this challenge. Who are we and where are we going? This process is indeed a matter of congregational identity and integrity. Guder (1998) admitted already that:

we share the conviction of a growing consensus of Christians in North America that the problem is much more deeply rooted. It has to do with who we are and what we are for. The real issues in the current crisis of the Christian church are spiritual and theological. (p. 3)

Just as I have argued elsewhere (Nel 2009:2–3), the process of seeking and finding identity is a complex and challenging one. One-sidedness and oversimplifications are many. It is not the place here to argue this again. Suffice to say that congregational identity is both a theological and cultural issue. The research question at stake here is what kind of preacher and preaching will help in this process. How do preachers help the members in worship understand that they worship the God of creation; that they worship the One who will not let go of what he has made and who loves his creation to the very end? I believe that the nature of the church as a creation of the Triune God does compel us to rethink ecclesiologies as such. However much room we make for local ecclesiologies, this should and does not have to mean absolute congregationalism. The body and its confessional unity, the body and its global intentions, the body and the total faith community, play a major role in understanding who we are in any local context. We live in a pluralistic world and ecclesiology has to take that into account.

De Reuver (2004) devotes a whole book to his research on the ecclesiological value of plurality. Dekker (2000:109–127, 185–197, 227–229) argues for the concept ‘church’ (*kerk*) and even takes up an argument against the concept ‘*gemeenteopbouw*’ (building up local churches) because the last mentioned, according to him, localises the church too much. Dekker’s (2000:126) ‘definition’ of the church is very much a sociological one: an institution formed by believers ... (*‘Door gelovigen gevormde instelling ...’*). It is true that the focus is on the reformation of the local congregation, as Jonkers and Bruinsma-de Beer argue (2000:18): ‘*gemeenteopbouw*’ focuses on the *lokale kerkelijke gemeente*. Schlottoff (1989:7–9) describes the ‘*Ortsgemeinde*’ to be the future of the church in Germany (cf. Brouwer *et al.* 2007:144–147). It is, however, not true that the subject field, as it is generally practiced, loses sight of the church as a whole.

In my thinking, the congregation is a local expression of the church of Christ in this world. The church has a global and local context (cf. Cameron *et al.* 2005:43–88). What can preachers do to facilitate reformation of the congregation without giving in to either absolute congregationalism or to post-congregational thinking, like McNeal argues for? In a foreword to the book by Hirsch and Ferguson, McNeal (2011a) argues:

More recently, a new expression of missional church has captured the attention of those of us who are tracking the missional movement. It is the rise of missional communities. This development signals the arrival of a new life form in the taxonomy of church life. The emergence of missional communities is part of the Spirit’s response to deploying the church in an increasingly *postcongregational* era. Translated into English, that means the church is figuring out a way to be present in populations that are not susceptible to becoming church people (people who align their spiritual journeys with the goals and rhythms of organized congregational church). (p. 13, author’s own emphasis)

In another book (McNeal 2011b), he writes:

the congregational approach to ‘doing church’ has entered its declining period ... A variety of indicators point to the same

conclusion: we have entered an era that is ripe for and needs a post-congregational church. (p. 7)

I am not there. I have opted, however difficult it may be, to argue for the reformation of any local church over and against ‘refounding’ or ‘resurrection’ (cf. Easum 2007:vii; Hirsch & Catchim 2012:146; McLaren 2008:128). It is probably the easier way to go. In an argument why church planting is a better way over revitalising local churches, Malphurs (2011) quotes Wagner as having said:

It is the difference between having babies and trying to raise the dead ... Struggling, established churches are steeped in complacency and the status quo and thus tend strongly to resist needed change. (p. 9)

I am tempted to say, I believe with my colleague Julian Müller who also could have given up on the church, that he and I have not. I believe that we both had enough reason (although different ones) to let go, but we have decided to ‘embrace the Church God gave me’ (Peterson 2009:127). What kind of preacher and preaching will guide congregations into this new understanding of themselves?

Preaching with integrity

Building up a missional local church is a long-term ministry within a relationship of trust (cf. Nel 2005b:372–375, 2011). Haokip (2004:283) writes: ‘It is a slow painstaking process. One needs patience. One may not even be able to see the fruits in one’s own life time.’ Trust is not built overnight. ‘Change takes time’ (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:64). Trust is also not built by playing roles. Integrity on the part of the preacher and preaching is vital in cultivation a relationship where people feel safe to change. In the book edited by William A. Carl III (2009), 30 well-known preachers, pastors and academics teaching homiletics participated. It is about ‘wisdom on Ministry from 30 leading Pastors and Preachers’ (Carl 2009:xi).

The editor himself agrees, ‘it will take more than the pulpit to create a new congregational culture’ (Carl 2009:40). He then zooms in on what kind of relationship will build trust where both preacher and preaching can play the important roles they should. He works with what he calls a ‘four S’ rule. Come to an agreement with the body of (no) Secrets, (no) Surprises, (no) Subversion and (lots of) Support (Carl 2009:41–44). In building trust, what happens outside of the pulpit is sometimes more important than what happens once the pastor is in the pulpit. The other principles discussed below support this understanding.

What I want to focus on, as part of this principle of integrity, is love of the congregation where you are. Michael Lindvall (2009) states it bluntly:

If you as a pastor cannot come to love the congregation you serve, if you do not love the culture and community in which your congregation is set, you have to leave. And do not wait too long. Ministers cannot effectively serve people whom they do not love. And if a pastor is ill at ease or at odds with the culture

of the larger community, the congregation will soon come to recognize it and view their minister as the outsider that he or she understands himself or herself to be. (p. 87)

In working with the concept of incarnation, Lindvall stresses the particularity and specificity of Jesus' incarnation. God loves to be specific and particular in his love and grace. In Lindvall's (2009:88) words, 'such divine choice of the particular implies God's great love for the very specificities that God has chosen to embody the divine.' Ministry according to him is 'incarnationally specific' (2009:88). It has to do with every specific setting whether it be rural, urban, rich, poor, culturally divided, et cetera:

The incarnational point here is that each person, each congregation, each context is loved by God in and for its particular uniqueness. Likewise, a pastor is called to see his or her people with the same 'lover's eye' to love them for what they are in and for their peculiarities. (Lindvall 2009:89)

In connection with this and with the issue of trust and integrity in the process of developing a missional local church, Lindvall (2009) mentions an image of love that is of utmost importance:

Lovers are not so much blind as they are somehow empowered by love to see their beloved with hope ... This, of course, is precisely the way God sees you and me, *simul justus et peccator*, 'saint and sinner at the same time'. (p. 91)

In his valuable contribution on what he calls *deep change*, Quinn (1996:34–35) emphasises the relation between trust and integrity in leadership. He also stress the fact that no such change in the organisation (organism in the case of the church) can and will take place unless it is taking place in the person of the leader:

They [*leaders*] can forcefully communicate at a level beyond telling. By having the courage to change themselves they model the behaviour they are asking of others. Clearly understood by almost everyone, this message, based in integrity, is incredibly powerful. It builds trust and credibility and helps others confront the risk of empowering themselves. (Quinn 1996:35; cf. also Doohan 2007)

Wiersbe (1996:223) is close to the heart with his remark: 'The most important part of a preacher's life is the part that only God sees'.

Preaching, listening and learning

Buchanan (2009) states it correctly, to my mind at least:

We are pastors. We will be preachers to the extent that we are pastors, accessible and available to our people. Our people will listen to us, allow us to be prophetic, to the extent that they know we care about them, love them, and will be there when they need us. (p. 31)

Pastoral hearts and minds tend to listen seriously. We are human and just do not know unless we listen and learn. Listening is in the deepest sense showing respect for the human dignity of somebody else as equally human in life and ministry (cf. Firet 1986:156–166 for a description of

the concept: *equihuman*). Listen and love belong together because when we love we listen. Frank Harrington (1996) served the same church in Atlanta, GA for more than two-thirds of his professional life. In reply to a question how his vision on preaching informed what he does each week, he said:

This church has encouraged me to articulate the dreams and hopes that God has laid upon my heart for these people. People and preaching always go together ... If you are not in constant touch with people – knowing their hurts, their hopes, their dreams, the rigors of the reality in which they are living – you may find yourself in the pulpit answering questions no one is asking. (p. 41)

It is what McClure (2009:108–113) calls 'preaching *from, with, and for*'. I would be willing to say there is no *for* if there is not *from* and *with*. His concept of 'collaborative or roundtable preaching' implies intentionally listening to the membership (cf. also McClure 1995). It is matter of seeking reality in preaching, which 'implies that you listen for the ways that those around you *are actually experiencing and interpreting life today in light of the meaning and power of the gospel*' (McClure 2009:110). His point is that the roundtable conversations help preachers understand, 'begin to hear the reality (or unreality) that the Word has in their lives' (McClure 2009:110).

In the words of Ronald Allen (2009):

Listening to what the *congregation says about preaching* can help ministers more deeply understand the context in which they preach so they can develop sermons that will engage the congregation. Such listening can also help a pastor come to a more penetrating understanding of other aspects of congregational culture. (p. 8)

Allen and others have conducted extensive research on preaching, hearing and listening (cf. Allen 2004; McClure *et al.* 2005; Mulligan *et al.* 2005). For the reason stated above, namely that I want to focus on the 'wisdom' of well-known pastors and preachers, I do not go into the important research by Dingemans (1995) and his reference the preacher as a '*hoorder onder die hoorders*' ['listener amongst listeners']. Allen (2009:10) refers to this also as 'listening to listeners'.

Listening is a mindset. For a preacher, it means a growing sensitivity for the two texts they are working with: the biblical and the context. Listening to the biblical text is almost second nature for any preacher; preachers get trained to do that and they should do so well. Bartlett (2009:21), in the wisdom he shared, says it in very traditional but important words: 'Preaching is Biblical'. We should know this text. Not just the pericope or fragment we preach on, 'we will preach better if we have a rich sense of the larger context in which these jewels are set' (Bartlett 2009:22). For preaching to be good news, to be God's good story, it has to be biblical. To this text we listen and do so over and over again. Preaching on missional identity necessitates serious listening to this 'old Text'. In her contribution to the book by Carl III, Alyce Mckenzie (2009) phrases it well:

Remembering that we inevitably preach what we practice, I commend attentiveness as the key habit of the preacher, with regard to exegesis of our inward lives, our congregation and community, as well as the biblical text ... What we discover to say and how we develop it will depend upon the answer to this question: To what are we attentive? (p. 117)

She continues to remark that if we are only attentive to technical issues (which in itself are not unimportant) in the text, such as authorship and original audience, we will offer a biblical lecture. We can also deliver a literature lecture by focusing on words, meanings et cetera (also not unimportant in itself):

If we are attentive only to our own desires, needs, and problems, we will deliver a motivational talk. The preacher needs to be attentive to what lies behind the text, in the text, and in front of the text. Every exegetical process and its resultant sermon should show evidence that the preacher has been attentive to all three realms. (Mckenzie 2009:117)

It is listening to the second text that is often lacking. Preaching is 'to keep your eye on the ball' (Long 2009:93–100). Long shared his 'wisdom' by referring extensively to the life and records of the well-known baseball player, Ted Williams. Williams was and still is considered by many as the greatest hitter in the game. His story is well depicted in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. In his book, Williams wrote: 'Much of your preparation is a matter of being observant, of picking up things ... What you are doing is building a frame of reference to work from' (Williams & Underwood 1986:14). Long (2009:95) uses this image to make his point: 'Good preachers keep their eyes open. The hungers, anxieties, and needs of the congregation and the culture are on full display to the watchful eye.' He continues by referring to a quote from Georges Bernanos' (1983) book *The diary of a country Priest*:

I know that my parish is a reality, that we belong to each other for all eternity; it is not a mere administrative fiction, but a living cell of everlasting Church. But if only God would open my eyes and unseal my ears so that I may behold the face of my parish and hear its voice. (p. 28)

The realities of ministry and the struggles of the church in a changing world can deafen our ears and blind our eyes. Preachers are often suffering of post-week trauma. They are tired by the time they finally find the time to 'listen', to be attentive. In her contribution to the book I find myself quoting so often, Jana Childers (2009:45–50) devoted her advice to preachers on 'Finding the Power to Preach When You're Exhausted'. The strain of the pastorate can make listening extremely tiresome. It is the love of God and for God, and the love of his people that help us develop ears to hear and eyes to see. The pastor in the preacher helps us to pay attention, even though it may be tiresome. In a passionate contribution, and with reference to the Jesus–Peter conversation on the beach, Hyung Cheon Rim (2009) makes a vital point that Jesus continued to ask 'Do you love Me' (Jn 21):

Love for the Lord comes before the love for the sheep ... If the priority is to love the sheep, then it will be difficult to continue

on with the ministry because the sheep is sometimes not easy to love ... The strength of loving the sheep comes from loving the Lord. (p. 135)

When that is the case, however difficult, the pastor preacher:

holds hands with the dying on a regular basis ... If you would preach keep in touch with the living and the dying ... Good preachers are on-the-job pastors and, because they internalize the laughter and the tears, they shape their words with tenderness. (Buttrick 2009:34–35)

He adds with seriousness: 'Oh, by the way, never take a dime for pastoral services ... Cash transactions corrupt pastoral ministry and thus can injure preaching' (Buttrick 2009:34–35).

One more important moment in this perspective on preaching and the preacher is the attitude of a disciple, a lifelong learner. This is true for every believer but also for preachers. This journey includes what we have discussed above. Lifelong learning is a journey of studying and listening to the biblical text; it is listening to the congregation and the context; it is also listening to other partners in this journey: those who lived before us and those who try to make sense of our world, sharing the same timespan. Earl Palmer (2009:121) calls it part of keeping his head clear. He refers to a quote from Blaise Pascal (1968), which he had carved as an inscription on a piece of driftwood and placed on his desk:

Do small things as if they were great, because of the majesty of Christ, who does them in us and lives our life, and does great things as if they were small and easy, because of his almighty power. (p. 316)

Palmer (2009) then adds:

First, I am encouraged by what Pascal wrote as if it were for me; second, the marker reminds me to be sure I read the book he wrote and other books too where I will find even more encouraging thoughts. (p. 121)

He continues (Palmer 2009:123–124) to challenge us to manage time such that reading is not only possible but a priority. He adds a long list of books, besides the Bible, that preachers will benefit from (2009:125–126). The point is that we learn and listen by reading. In Palmer's words (2009):

Find authors with whom you develop a special kind of friendship. Try to read everything they have written. They aren't masters of our minds, because we won't always agree with what they have written; they're more like companions who especially challenge and encourage our pilgrimage as Christians. They become our mentors. (p. 125)

Leanne van Dyk (2009:166) refers to many strategies necessary to keep up pastoral ministry, such as, amongst others, healthy exercising and participating in peer support groups. She adds: 'Another strategy is creating and pursuing a lifelong learning plan.' The degree we carry is but the entry point of this journey. 'A plan for lifelong learning can serve as one tool to encourage, strengthen, and deepen the pastor' (Van Dyk 2009:166). She points to the fact that such a plan should be supported by the congregation and should include

continuing education and sabbaticals. 'It should also include a regular pattern of reading. A plan of reading can be an individual exercise, or a small group, or both' (2009:167). Van Dyk (2009) continues in a further paragraph by stating:

Preaching in particular can benefit from reading, both in theological and biblical disciplines, and also in fiction and nonfiction sources. The preacher who reads consistently preaches more creatively and compellingly because resources far beyond the experience of the preacher are brought to the task of proclamation. (p. 167)

Van Dyk (2009) ends her contribution by saying:

A lifelong learning plan will include many other goals as well, all of which can contribute to a healthy and long life of pastoral ministry. But there is hardly a more enjoyable learning plan than the steady reading of wonderful novels and nonfiction. Both pastor, in sermon preparation and pastoral care, and congregation in listening and discussing, will learn to spot the deep incarnational resemblances between themes of the gospel and the themes of human experience and observation. The sustaining of pastoral ministry through reading will, in fact, support both pastor and people. (p. 171)

The well-known William Willimon (2009) states it bluntly:

Good preachers are good readers. I've never known a good writer who was not a great reader. The same is true for preachers ... In my old age, I am reading more poetry, more fiction (which is usually more true than nonfiction) and less contemporary theology. (p. 180; cf. also Willimon 2000:151-167)

Or, as Fred Craddock (1996:38) phrases it: 'Through preaching, you share time spent in the study, with the whole congregation'.

Within the broader context of this article reading stories of congregations is of utmost importance. Boshart (2011) writes:

Because of the frame-breaking, highly contextual, and incarnational nature of a missional ecclesiology, it is often not easy to predict how this ecclesiology will be fleshed out in terms of practices to be replicated in many contexts. Barrett's (2006) research demonstrates how case studies of missional churches provide what Bent Flyvbjerg (2006:228) refers to as the 'force of example' in understanding the nature of a phenomenon. (p. 21)

Preachers should be excited about what happens in other churches on their journey. And how will they know that if they do not read such books and stories. Long and Killinger (1996) summarise it well in working with the image of the preacher as witness, a truth-teller:

That person carries with her or with him all of the questions and concerns and needs of the community from which he or she comes, but goes to Scripture prepared to hear whatever Scripture wishes to say about that need or action. Then the person turns and tells the truth about what has been seen and heard. (p. 97; cf. also Long 2005)

To close this section let me quote from one of the 20th century's greatest preachers, John Stott (1996:189) when he says: 'To build a bridge between the modern world and the biblical world, we must first be careful students of both' (cf. also Stott 2000:113-128).

Preaching and seeking for meaning

In the so-called missional conversation, Van Gelder (2007) refers to a 'hermeneutical turn' as:

Shorthand to explain the shift that occurred in human knowing during the twentieth century. This shift primarily involves the developments in philosophical hermeneutics, which have made us aware of the interpreted character of all human knowing, including the interpreted character of interpretation. (pp. 104, 188; cf. also Van Gelder 2004:43-44)

Add to this the interpretation of many who believe that in this postmodern world 'we're living in the most anti-intellectual period in the history of the church' (Sproul 1996:180). It is a time where 'most Christians couldn't tell you even the basics of their faith' (Barna 1996:20).

Research on how young adults view the church and what a challenge this is to developing missional churches supports these remarks:

Theologically conservative Christians are widely perceived as being aloof and unwilling to engage in genuine dialogue, out of fear of 'caving in' to the broader culture. But such openness is essential in relating to Mosiacs (known also as 'Generation Y') and Busters (known as 'Generation X'), who represent the 'conversation generations'. According to Kinnaman and Lyons [2007:33], 'mosaic and Busters ... want to discuss, debate, and question everything. This can be either a source of frustration or an interest we use to facilitate new and lasting levels of spiritual depth in young people. Young outsiders want to have discussion, but they perceive Christians as unwilling to engage in genuine dialogue. They think of conversation as 'persuasion' sessions, in which the Christian downloads as many arguments as possible. (Gibbs 2009:14)

In his valuable contribution to the issues surrounding leadership in missional churches, the well-known Carroll (2011:93) puts it as follows: 'Clergy are interpreters of meaning. Congregations experience crises of meaning on small and large scale. It is considerably more than a verbal cognitive enterprise.' He does so in building his argument for what he calls 'reflective leadership' (Carroll 2011:114-144; cf. also Selby's 2012:41-65 concept of 'meaning making').

In this postmodern and post-Christendom period people are not looking for easy answers. There is little room for an authoritarian 'I know it all' approach. It is okay not to know:

Don't be afraid of what you don't know. Instead embrace 'unknowing' as a gift for preaching ... It can become paralyzing at times. How can I preach when I am out of words and I have nothing to say? How can I preach when I'm not even sure the gospel is true? In a world of seemingly endless and empty words is there anything left to say? (Hudson 2009:75)

This attitude frees the preacher 'to be human before God on behalf of the congregation' (Hudson 2009:76). Hudson thinks that 'the questioning preacher may name the human burden of faith in ways that people in the pews need to hear'. In the words of Müller (2011): '*Om te mag twyfel: 'n gelowige se reis'* (cf. also Sproul 1993). Long (2011:152) even refers to this in

the title of his book *What shall we say? Evil, suffering, and the crisis of faith* and states his purpose throughout: 'to think through what preachers can say, what teachers can teach, about the question of theodicy' (cf. also the review essay on the book in Mahn 2012).

Preachers do not have to prove redemption and the transforming power of the gospel. They are but co-journeers. Sermons should not try to convince but encourage to seek and to follow. Craig Barnes (2009), the new President of Princeton Theological Seminary and well-known for his preaching, says:

no one get argued into the kingdom ... The preacher's job is simply to reveal that love [of the Father for the prodigal son]. Then the memory of the Father's house is rekindled in the pews, and the journey to the outstretched arms is begun. (p. 17)

It is okay to stand in the pulpit scared, writes Buttrick (2009:33). Preachers should 'avoid avoidance' and 'honor complexity' (McClure 2009:111). All the texts with which preachers are working are complex and not easy to read. Members are not looking for easy answers on their journey to understand their missional identity, which in itself is radical in nature. Preaching is also to walk with the membership on 'the journey of discipleship, a pilgrimage, not a ceremonial lap ... and faithful preaching itself takes the long, steady pilgrim path of valleys and peaks' (Long 2009:99). Huffman (1996:65) acknowledges this same challenge: 'The reality is that I am a translator. That means immersing myself in what they read, do, and think, yet trying to bring to it a prophetic edge'. Killinger, who was interviewed together with Tom Long, says: 'The sermon, even a brief sermon, is able to put us on the road to discovery' (Long & Killinger 1996:101; cf. also Long 2000:83–94). In the same interview Long says:

You need to construct – in your mind, at least – a seminar around the text, in which multiple voices are brought in, as a way of seeing multiple possibilities that are in the text. (Long & Killinger 1996:103)

In this conversation with the multiple texts, on behalf of and together with the congregation, one often realises that 'the gospel is not an intellectual dilemma as much as it is a discipleship dilemma' (Willimon 1996:228).

Preaching and vision

Is the preaching journey then a journey of doubts so that we may preach better? Doubt in itself is not the answer to listening and preaching with integrity. 'A doubt-filled church inevitably lacks that spiritual resources need to empower dynamic movements' (Hirsch & Catchim 2012:xxx). Meaning giving and seeking is the way in which preachers with a vision preach. It is the way of integrity. However, as sure as is the vision to help this congregation become God's mission to God's world, getting there is a journey full of uncertainties and complexities. Therefore:

when you prepare the sermon envision the faces of those who are apt to be listening. Notice what you are praying for God to do in their lives. Preach toward that. (Bartlett 2009:23)

Vision is ultimately to trust God, even though we sometimes understand so little of 'his ways'. The attitude I tried to communicate in the previous section does not mean that we become afraid of the prophetic. To admit that one does not know (easy answer to complex realities) does not mean that we do not know anything, especially not when we engage in prophetic preaching, not 'on the basis of God's law' (Buttrick 2009:37), but from the beauty of the beatitudes (Mt 5–7). Preachers do not trust *in* their vision when they preach, they trust in the God of the Word and the Spirit with Power (cf. Childers 2009:48–49). Easum (2010:1–13) is correct when he almost assumes that preaching for transformation means that 'you have a clear vision of where God wants your church to go'.

Craddock (2009:51–56) argues for what he calls a 'signature sermon' in which pastors, amongst other things, share what they confess and what they see (cf. Peterson 2009:130 for his emphasis on how for example the letter to the Ephesians can help us see; cf. also Craddock 2000:41–54). This understanding of vision is deeply related to the issue of integrity:

Everyone who preaches brings to the task the totality of his or her personality. The qualities that create the preacher grow out of the mystical interplay of the gospel on the mental and emotional equipment of the preacher. An awareness of this fact gives to each an authenticity and a style to be found nowhere else. (Taylor 2009:157; cf. also Nel 2005a)

A clear vision of this local church becoming in this community what God plans for them also helps us believe in the transformational power of preaching (Easum 2010:13).

The well-known Bill Hybels (1996:76) says in his almost self-hurting willingness for scrutinised evaluation of his preaching: 'I find myself asking the famous two-word question all throughout my sermon preparation process, which is the phrase "So what?". With him I believe that preaching with vision makes one ask this critical question. It is ultimately the question of the preacher: who are we and where are going? It is also to firmly believe in preaching as a 'unique opportunity for communication' as John Stott confesses:

I still believe that preaching is the key to the renewal of the church. I am an impenitent believer in the power of preaching ... when a man [or woman] stands before the people of God with the Word of God in his hand and the Spirit of God in his heart, you have a unique opportunity for communication. (in Hybels 1996:76)

Preaching and public involvement

Being missional has everything to do with being public. Missional churches seek the Kingdom. They participate in what God is doing in their contexts. God is publicly involved. Two basic remarks from the wisdom of others are in place here.

Firstly, it is important that the preacher or leader work with other public figures in the same context. De la Torre (2009:57–62) recalls how he, as a person of colour, was invited by a

group of White pastors to discuss the diversification of their congregations in a multicultural context. He noticed that there were (including himself) only two ministers of colour in the room. For an hour the discussion went on and even plans were put together without any input from the only two ministers of colour. He then asked:

why would you assume that I would even *want* to worship at your church. After centuries of exclusion, why would I come running now that you think it makes your church look good by having a black or brown face in the pew ...? No church should consider diversifying unless it first gets saved. (p. 62)

Secondly, when a public issue becomes your passion you become a public advocate for that case. Katherine Henderson (2009:66) puts it this way: 'When your heart is broken open, when the engine of empathy is activated, you must become literate, even expert about that issue.' She suggests becoming an expert by getting behind the scenes and exploring the deep reasons behind unchecked injustices in your context. She even suggests that one:

develops your own media savvy. Speaking out in public may require a different set of skills than those required for the pulpit. If we are to become visible and credible spokespersons on the public issues that break our hearts ... we need to develop new oratory muscles. (Henderson 2009:66)

Preachers need to be positive examples of contextual engagement. That is what the church is being challenged with: how do we follow Jesus Christ in this context? How do we discern and participate in what God is doing? How do we seek the reign of God in our community? Frank Harrington was listed three times as one of the '100 Most Influential People' in the *Atlanta Business Weekly*. Some say he impacted the whole city with his preaching. In response to a question on this, Harrington (1996) replied:

The influence I have is because of the possibility that I may impact the people who sit in this church week after week after week, and through them impact the city. You see the reality is that if I can influence the people who sit in the pews of this church to walk closer to Jesus Christ, this church can have a role in shaping the destiny of this city. That is both a great opportunity and a great responsibility. (p. 45)

Conclusion

I do not know of any scholar in my field that would even suggest that preaching alone would make churches change. Change, reformation, revitalisation, or whatever concept is preferred, is comprehensive in nature. I do however believe that when the comprehensivity is realised the important impact of preaching will be rediscovered. Craddock (1996) testifies to this:

Preaching generates a high level of expectation like no other single act in the church. In preaching, as in all other ministries, God is at work – continually changing his very own to be his mission to the world. (p. 34)

I confess, with Leith Anderson (1996:11), 'The sermon itself is a powerful agent of change' (cf. also Jackson 1996:83). With Kendall (1996:91), I also believe 'that God will honor a church that is making preaching central – and a preacher

who is making exposition the center of his preaching'. In the planned empirical research in South Africa, the above wisdom and theological insights of well-known scholars may very well be used in the conceptualisation process.

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