



Bishopdale Theological College (Nelson)

The Institute of New Anglicanism

School of Preaching

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for veterans 😊

The Five Corners

towards a means of describing and evaluating the sermon journey

Preaching Generically

towards an appreciation of the variety within the literature of the Bible

Preaching Inductively

towards a more spacious approach to biblical preaching?



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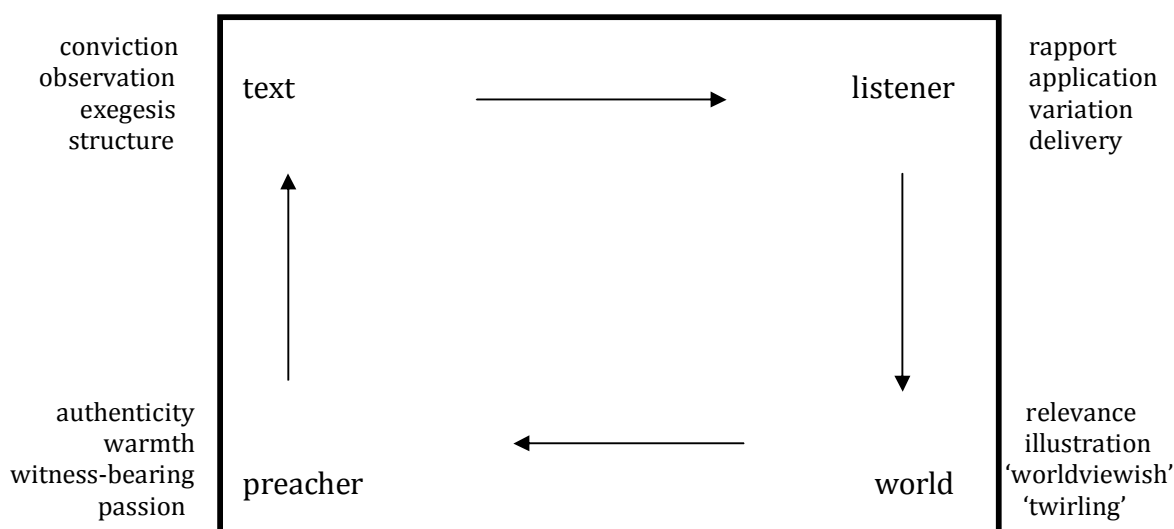
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1. The Five Corners:

towards a means of describing and evaluating the sermon journey

Transformative preaching is discovered by journeying into five corners...



In a nutshell...

"Transformational preaching visits five corners. Anchored by deep convictions about the Word of God, it commences with an openness of the Bible and an openness to the Spirit as time is taken to observe what the text is actually saying. It draws on the best commentaries to ensure the most accurate exegesis of the text and then it commits to clarity of structure, believing it to be a key ingredient in building the momentum of the sermon as well as gaining and maintaining attention of listeners.

With this in place virtually anything is permissible in the pursuit of rapport with a congregation. There just must be connection. A variation in all aspects of the presentation will help, as will a specific application which keeps in mind a congregation's diversity. Then within the Kiwi context, a 'lucis' delivery can contribute a great deal to building that rapport: Laidback, Understated, Conversational, Informal, and Self-deprecating.

In such transformational preaching the sermon is infused with the freshness and vibrancy of a relevance to the 'real-world' in which people live - and it is a worldviewish preaching in that it explores the motivation behind and below that living. All listeners hear the preacher speaking their language and utilising illustrations from their world. This is best achieved when the preacher enters that world with a personal investment in 'twirling' - as a Thinker, a Watcher, an Inventor, a Reader, and a Listener.

With all this bubbling away in the preparation, transformational preaching never loses sight of the preacher's own participation in the process. There is an authenticity which seeps into every aspect of life and ministry and this is then fused with both a warmth in the face and eyes as well as a passion in the voice and manner. Furthermore, in a world overwhelmed by a surplus of words, the words of this preacher stand out as different because they include words which bear witness to the truth being proclaimed from within the story of their own lives.

And when these four corners have been probed there is no meeting in the middle of the room. The text still provides the shape and purpose of the sermon and so all that is gleaned in these other three corners is now brought back to the text – now a fifth corner in which the transformational sermon is borne and built and written.

And so transformational preaching is about taking the stories of the listeners, the world, and the preacher and weaving them around the Biblical story. Transformational preaching is about bringing to the exegesis ('unpacking') of the listener, the world, and the preacher the very same skills of exegesis which we bring to the Biblical text. Transformational preaching is pursued in overt and vocal dependence upon the Spirit of God who can be relied upon to superintend the entire process because it acknowledges his inspiring, illuminating, convicting, and anointing work."

How would you describe the sermon which lingers for too long in just one corner?

the text?

the listener?

the world?

the preacher?

1. the text

This first corner is going nowhere. Each of the other three corners come to it with their respective concerns. There is no meeting in the middle of the room!
The dynamic of the sermon event takes place in this corner.

Four issues

- a. deep conviction (see Session #3 on Saturday)

"the secret is not found in mastering certain techniques,
but in being mastered by certain convictions" (John Stott)

What are some of the convictions which should master us...

... about God?

... about the Bible?

... about Jesus?

... about the Spirit?

... about the church?

... about history?

... about the preacher?

... about the world?

- b. full observation (see Session #1 on Saturday)

- c. accurate exegesis (enroll in a course at Bishopdale for this one)

words

context (historical:literary:theological)

genre

d. clear structure (see Session #2 on Saturday)

There just must be movement and shape, progression and design in a sermon. Clear structure means clear thinking which means increased possibilities for clear understanding which, therefore, means increased potential for a clear obedience!

2. *the listeners ('believers')*

In the time frame available, a single skill for each of three critical areas:

a. illustration – it is about ‘twirling’

Become a *Thinker*

what?

the need for creative and critical thinking – both generative and evaluative
‘ideas have legs’ – the best thinking is inherently practical (but it may take time)
probing beyond asking ‘what?’ - to asking ‘how?’ and ‘why?’
beware of getting yourself all tied up in #8 fencing wire...

Become a *Watcher*

what?

the capacity to see the spiritually significant in the utterly ordinary ‘n everyday
(examples from Langham Preaching work; also *Mere Christianity*)
the genius and genesis of Rob Bell’s *nooma* work
the parts of Bible which are image-laden

Become an *Inventor*

what?

dredge your own life experiences for stories which bear-witness to the truth
repent of using clichés, taking the time to invent a fresh paraphrase
work at words – they are our tools of the trade – become a wordsmith
brood over your sermon, allow time for the ‘incubation of ideas’

Become a *Reader*

what?

follow a few footnote trails to the seminal and original writer
avoid chronological snobbery and the idolatry of the contemporary

Become a *Listener*

what?

play dumb more and learn the art of gentle, probing and open-ended questions
to be successful in any talking-profession requires that we be good listeners
“did I finish my lunch first?”

“I am prepared to be interested in what other people find interesting” (Stuart Briscoe)

b. application

How would you apply *John 3:16* to each one of these unchanging people in a congregation?

John 3:16	<i>"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"</i>
<i>Matthew</i> unconverted, unchurched, self-satisfied; needing to be softened, awakened, humbled	
<i>Sunil</i> enquiring, interested, ignorant; needing to be informed of what being a Christian means	
<i>Maria</i> convicted, seeking, ripe; needing to be guided directly to Christ	
<i>Jessica</i> young (in age and/or faith); needing to be built up and led on	
Anna ageing both physically and spiritually; needing to be encouraged and affirmed	
Ian in a bad space in his private world - 'fallen' or broken; needing to be acknowledged	
<i>Sarah</i> 'de-churched', hurt, cynical; needing to be heard and welcomed	
<i>Sione</i> mature and healthy; needing to still stretch and grow further	

If you do not intentionally think about people unlike yourself, all your application will gravitate towards people like yourself ... and that is just not good enough. The gospel is a boundary-crosser, tearing down the walls that divide people – and so must our application.

Other issues:

SW? and YBH? (Michael Quicke)

“are we together?” (Albert Mukanga) – “achieve togetherness” (James Earl Massey)

“storming the citadel of the will” – preaching is persuasive speech

application OR ... implication? (Darrell Johnson)

the place of collaborative preparation

c. delivery

In the Kiwi setting, is 'Lucis' preaching what builds rapport?

L.....

U.....

C.....

I.....

S.....

How true is this?

Whichever way you turn, embrace an 'oral style' – rather than a written one:

As you prepare your sermon, preach it aloud in your study and then write down what you find yourself saying. Use a tape recorder if necessary. 'If you can't hear yourself saying it, don't.'

Listeners cannot re-listen like readers can re-read.

Repetition is not redundant, it is required.

When we are bored by a sermon we ought to first check out the length of the sentences . . . and the number of syllables in individual words!

Some FAQs

What about preaching with, or without, notes?

What about the right length for a sermon?

What about using powerpoint slides?

What about a lectern and/or going walkabouts?

What about

3. the world

a. a conviction: to be preachers committed to text & context, word & world.

“double listening” (John Stott); a biblical and cultural exegesis is required

moving 'between two worlds' – juxtaposition, analogy, osmosis, resonance...

b. an embrace: the significance of worldview

... *we must preach worldviewishly...*

What is a worldview?

images: *lens, current, foundation, roots*

What do all these images have in common?

the is

challenges:

like swimming fish: *it is hard to see!*

like broken glasses: *it is hard to fix!*

NT (Tom) Wright:

"To ignore worldviews, either our own or those of the culture we are studying would result in an extraordinary shallowness."

CS Lewis:

"The critical ideas in society are not the ones being argued, but the ones being assumed."

Not what is in the headlines ... but behind the headlines

Not what is in the lines ... but between the lines

Not what fills talkback conversation ... but what shapes talkback hosts

Not the answers being given ... but the questions not being asked

definitions:

It is 'the culturally determined set of filters through which we perceive and experience reality'

Often they are most easily expressed in words ending with "-ism"

What are some of the significant ones at work in today's culture?

.....
.....
.....

These are the roots. These are the foundations. These are the currents.

Without merely displaying their knowledge, the preacher must surface these worldviews in their preaching, allowing the invisible to become visible and asking what they look like through a biblical lens. Everyone has a worldview. The Bible has a worldview. Jesus has a worldview ... there is a Christian worldview. Biblical preaching is about developing such a worldview in our people....

asking the beyond the 'how?'

switching the with the 'at'

questions:

A worldview can be determined by asking four questions:

Who are we? (what is the nature, task, and purpose of human beings?)

Where are we? (what is the nature of the world and the universe in which we live?)

What's wrong? (what is the basic obstacle that keeps us from attaining 'fulfilment')

What is the solution? (how is it possible to overcome this hindrance?)

[See Brian Walsh & Richard Middleton (The Transforming Vision)]

Or, simply explore the way Identity and Destiny is being developed

The lyrics of songs The advertising on billboards
 The plotlines and characterisation in movies (especially, Christ-figures)

illustrations

+ watch the way worldviews change over time

For example: the same Robin Hood as told over three generations...

	1930s – Errol Flynn (my father’s generation)	1980s – Kevin Costner (my generation)	2010s – BBC series maybe Russell Crowe?! (my children’s generation)
attitude to religion			
attitude to gender			

+ watch the way worldviews change across culture

For example: the same *Pride & Prejudice* told by Hollywood and Bollywood.

4. the preacher

a. restoring the balance

(i) *It is not just about being a follower of Jesus...*

It is about prepositions. My facebook page has me as a “prepositional Christian”. Spirituality is enabled and energised as we live a prepositional life. It *is* about following Jesus in a way that recognises him as Lord and Master – but it is also about uniting with Christ. We are in Christ. Christ is in us. There is a mutual indwelling. Unique among the religions of the world, Christianity is about a merger with the founder.

... it is about being connected to Christ in diverse ways

Question: What is the consequence of all this for the preacher?

(ii) *It is not just about going on a journey...*

With the biblical motifs related to spirituality, the “journey” has taken over. And it has been around ever since (Dante, Bunyan, Tolkein...).

But the idea of a destination-less journey is a sub-biblical motif. ‘Arrival’ is a concept we embrace just as much as ‘journey’. There is this certain hope that our destiny is a destination and this is what energises the endurance for the journey. A Bible with hope deleted and journey celebrated is no Bible at all. It is just a bunch of wilderness wanderings. *And* the journey is a walk with God all the time, every step (even when it feels like he is absent). He calls us we travel with him. Sometimes the sun goes behind the clouds. *solvitur ambulando cum deo*

... it is about a calling to obey and a walking-with-God until the destination is reached

Question: What is the consequence of all this for the preacher?

(iii) *It is not just about streams of spirituality...*

Richard J. Foster’s *Streams of Living Water* (Harper Collins, 1998) is an introduction to the traditions of spirituality which flow down to us: contemplative, holiness, charismatic, social justice, evangelical, and incarnational. Foster does affirm that “all

the traditions that form the structure of this book are deeply rooted in Scripture” (32) and yet there is a stream associated specifically with scripture – namely, the evangelical one. hmmm?!

In practice Foster's stated intention to bring balance into spirituality doesn't easily happen. The tendency is for spiritually-minded Christians to hop into their kayak and find their way into the stream they prefer. I watch. I listen. Balance too easily becomes preference. And preference always finds it hard to choose what we don't like ... and what we don't like is probably exactly what we most need.

In theory I remain unconvinced about the 'Evangelical' stream being just one of the streams in the river. This is the one which nurtures a focus on the scriptures and sharing the gospel. Is this just another stream? Surely this one is more than just a stream in the river? Isn't it more the *banks* for the river? It is the one which determines the course of the river. It reaches right across the river providing the channel to include things from *every* stream, but not *everything* from every stream. It discerns what is a bit toxic and is able to divert it out of the river altogether.

Let's embrace the single source. Let's allow the river to flow wide 'n full – but between clear 'n strong 'n high banks. Let's go with the flow to the mouth as we negotiate the dangers of the delta and delight in the goodness of the God who travels with us.

... it is about banks for that spirituality

Question: What are the implications of this for the preacher?

(iv) *It is not just about gifts and abilities...*

For twenty years I have had gifted people confidently waltz into preaching classes and invariably they got knocked back a bit. This is not where the issues lie – no matter how often spiritual gifts teaching is recycled (afterall, do spiritual gifts *determine* obedience or do they *energise* obedience?).

... it is about character and attitude and obedience

Question: What are the implications of this for the preacher?

b. stressing the mandate

(i) *In preaching do I prepare (the focus)?*

Not just my sermon ...but also my self!

"Preaching is not the performance of an hour - it is the outflow of a life" (EM Bounds)

I remember my surprise when a godly and experienced preacher relayed to me that he now spends more time preparing himself than he does preparing his sermon!

Part of preparing ourselves in this age is to be prepared to *use* ourselves more in our sermons. We need to dredge our life experience for stories of our encounters with God and with every human emotion and then in creative ways bring those into our preaching and thereby *bear witness* to the living God at work in the ragged edges of our lives. A measured vulnerability, a restrained transparency is critical.

(ii) *In preaching do I prepare (the means)?*

Not just through my study ... but also through his Spirit!

'If there is no great agony in our hearts, there will be no great words on our lips'
'the Spirit fills the life and that fills the mouth.'

c. mustering the character

- be secure in who I am, as a person and as a preacher, before God
- keep myself down low before God
- be honest in my dealings with the text, God, listeners, resources, self
- discover my birthright - by virtue of being in the image of a Creator
- struggle through to the simplicity on the far side of complexity
- be real, without overdoing it and becoming self-absorbed
- 'as dying man to dying men'
- be prepared to sweat!

*a + b + c + d + e + f + g + h = UNCTION?
OR, puts us in the way of being unctionized by God
who chooses to so 'anoint' as he pleases*

5. the text

The art of taking discoveries from the other three corners and adding it to my work in the text's corner without allowing it to trump the text – or reshape its meaning and message.

NB: Not only do the 'five corners' provide a simple metaphor for the journey towards the sermon, they also provide a means for discussing and evaluating the sermon in a non-threatening way.

2. Preaching Generically

towards an appreciation of the variety within the literature of the Bible

Be it a newspaper article, a label on a can of baked beans, a letter from home, a telephone directory, or a recipe for chocolate cake - every time we read we are engaging a genre of some kind & we operate under certain interpretive principles - usually unspoken, but operating nonetheless.

Each of these is a different genre – or type of literature. A genre is “a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing” (S. Greidanus).

We are in search of a genre-sensitive approach to preaching. The life of churches is littered with examples where this principle has not been followed and the consequences are dire.

Question – What happens when the book of Proverbs is read like the letter to the Romans? ... And what of that misguided and simplistic litmus test of evangelical orthodoxy: “do you interpret the Bible *literally?*” ... and what a mess this becomes when we come to biblical genre where figurative language plays such a prominent role. To interpret figurative and imaginative and evocative and affective language *literally* is to ruin it.

What do you think it means to preach “the whole counsel of God”?

1. three new testament genre

- a. the gospel genre
with special reference to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Read (again and aloud) all four Gospels in order to understand the one single story of Jesus

Free each gospel to tell its own story about Jesus – and preach to highlight this reality.

Complementary, rather than contradictory. Don't over-harmonise.

Start by preaching with an eye on two features:

literary structure: Matthew? Mark? Luke? John?

theological purpose: Matthew? Mark? Luke? John?

Be confident about the historical reliability of the gospel accounts. They ‘record the facts *about* Jesus, recall the teaching *of* Jesus and bear witness *to* Jesus’. Be wary of scholars and commentators who over-humanise, de-miraclise, de-historicise.

If the story is the ‘drama’, pay attention to the ‘stage’ on which the drama takes place (historical context).

Preach individual stories in light of their neighbouring stories – and the whole story (literary context).

The gospel is ‘good news’ – so find it in the story and preach it. Stay away from ‘good advice’

Always look for Jesus – fully human and fully divine – but don't forget the disciples.

Focus on the final hours of Jesus' life – just like the gospels do.

“One dare not think he or she can properly interpret the Gospels without a clear understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus.” (Gordon Fee)

it is here!

it is to come!

Consider retelling the story as a story ... in the sermon-time

character development plot sequence build the tension – and resolve it

ask the interrogatives: Who (characters), What (storyline), When (time), Where (place), Why (reason), How (means)

Never lose sight of a key hermeneutical question: where are the limits of Jesus being a model for us to follow? At what point is Jesus our model and at what point is it the disciples?

“the proclaimer has become the proclaimed”

Some favourite sermon series from the gospels...

b. the epistolary genre

with special reference to 1 Peter

Read them as whole letters in their entirety – and do it again and again, sensing something of the overall flow of the argument.

Epistles have a settled form, a debated authorship, and an occasional nature.

They are not essays, nor are they readymade theology - but a pastoral response to a specific occasion. They are “real letters addressed to specific people occasioned by concrete issues” (Carson, Moo, Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 259).

1 Peter?

Soak in the restraining influence of (their) context.

Value those ‘introductory’ pages of the best commentaries . This material on authorship and destination and audience and themes etc all work to stitch together the ‘other side of the telephone conversation.’ We have the answers, but we do not always know what the questions or problems were.

Don’t rush to seeing it as a word for us too soon. It was not primarily for us and the *only* way to create a sense of accurate relevance is through historical investigation and interpretation.

Work hard to avoid the two common hermeneutical errors. Always be as wary of *your own* cultural wrappings as you are the cultures of the Biblical writers and churches.

+ the ‘cut and paste’ error *1 Peter?*

+ the ‘delete and escape’ error *1 Peter?*

Preach paragraphs at the least, and ‘sections’ at the most.

Learn to be content to be silent where Scripture is silent.

“If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.”

Don't avoid the indicative in the rush for the imperative – it is always tempting to move beyond the 'doctrine' and get to the 'application'. But the letters have this flow to them.

Ephesians 1-3

doctrine
exposition
privileges
theory
believing
indicative

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

Ephesians 4-6

ethics
exhortation
responsibilities
practise
behaving
imperative

Be sensitive to the influence of (our) changing context. For example, preaching 1 Peter 5 ("threats to church community" as a theme) in these different settings...

<i>"threats"</i>	pentecostal urban young adult	rural elderly Anglican	Pakistan
power (5:1-4)			
pride (5:5-6)			
anxiety (5:7)			
satan (5:8-11)			

Some favourite sermon series from the epistles...

- c. the apocalyptic genre
with special reference to Revelation

Here is one person's densely packed description of apocalyptic literature (☺):

"The revelatory communication of heavenly secrets by an other-worldly being to a seer who presents the visions in a narrative framework; the visions guide readers into a transcendent reality that takes precedence over the current situation and encourages readers to persevere in the midst of their trials. The visions reverse normal experience by making the heavenly mysteries the real world and depicting the present crisis as a temporary, illusory situation. This is achieved via God's transforming this world for the faithful."

(Paul Hanson, *Visionaries and Their Apocalypses*, 25-26)

What features stand out to you from this description?

.....

.....

.....

.....

It is a mixed genre: “a prophecy cast in an apocalyptic mould and written down in a letter form” (Carson, Moo, Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 479). This complicates the interpretive task. The multiple fulfilments of prophecy, the occasional nature of epistles, and the dependence upon figurative language... all of these become significant.

For example, take the symbolic, the figurative, the imaginative ... it will be clearer to the original readers and not so clear to us ... “but this gap must not be filled with speculation - preachers must realise that they are being less, not more, faithful to the text if they interpret literally what was originally intended to be taken symbolically” (M. Shuster, “Preaching from Acts, Hebrews, General Epistles, and Revelation” in Martin & Davids (ed) *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 952).

Reflect on the ‘big five’ characteristics of apocalyptic literature:

cosmic, having characters moving with ease between heaven and earth and hell

dualistic, with evil and good forces at work, almost equally matched

eschatological, with its focus on the end of history, the final stages of human existence

the *ecstatic* vision, dream or supernatural journey; heaps of images but just the one vision

symbolism, “to interpret a symbol literally when it is metaphoric is simply to misinterpret” (Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 137).

It must mean something to them long before it means something to us. “Because of its very claim to reveal what is shortly to happen, apocalypse has been viewed as a road map into and a blueprint of the future. The tragic flaw in this view is the assumption that the book’s frame of reference is the reader’s contemporary age rather than the author’s.” (Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 137). So work overtime in trying to reconstruct, as much as possible, the original historical situation.

Apocalyptic literature originates in periods of oppression and persecution – and so it is designed to inspire hope and faith – so should our preaching from it. No room for fear and uncertainty and anxiety!

Look for archetypes – the image, plot, motif, or concept that appears with again and again. For example, light, darkness, blood, lamb, water, sea, throne, war, gold, bride – what they mean to us and our day is irrelevant. Look for Old Testament allusions – most symbols in Revelation have a long history.

Be content with a mature response which says “I am just not sure what it all means!”

“Stress the theological and not the predictive with humility ... I personally believe that one reason for the use of cryptic symbols was to keep the reader from giving the future fulfilment too great a place in the message of the book. The writer wanted to turn the reader toward God, not just toward future events.” (Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 231).

Don't move too far away from the central themes, the 'grand design', that emerges in the book. Craig Keener adds them up as well as anyone (Craig Keener, *Revelation*, 41):

- + God is awesomely majestic, as well as sovereign in our troubles
- + Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb ultimately brings complete deliverance to those who trust him
- + God's judgements on the world are often to serve notice that he will avenge his people
- + regardless of how things appear in the short term, sin will not go unpunished and God will judge
- + God can accomplish his purposes through a small and persecuted remnant; he is not dependent on what the world values as powerful
- + worship leads us from grief over our sufferings to God's purposes from an eternal perspective
- + proclaiming Christ invites persecution, the normal state of committed believers in this age
- + Jesus Christ is worth dying for
- + a radical contrast exists between God's kingdom and the world's values
- + the hope God has in mind for us far exceeds our present sufferings
- + God's plan and church ultimately include representatives of all peoples

Always, always, always preach these kinds of themes.

Some favourite sermon series from Revelation...

It is a call to worship: 14 songs in the book of Revelation.

(Robert Coleman, *Songs of Heaven*)

Eugene Petersen breaks open the book in a fresh way (Petersen, *Reversed Thunder*): "the last word" on scripture, on Christ, on the church, on worship, on evil, on prayer, on witness, on politics, on judgement, on salvation, on heaven etc (11 sermons in the series).

2. *three old testament genre*

a. the narrative genre

with special reference to Exodus and Nehemiah

read the story - reread it and then read it again, aloud and with feeling!

read scenically – appreciate the natural structure in the story

read theo-centrally – look for God, perennial winner of 'Best Actor', in the story

The OT is *not* a bunch of potted biographies

but "a theological history of how God related to his covenant people."

[Carter, Duvall, Hays, *Preaching God's Word* (Zondervan, 2005) 223]

Exodus?

Nehemiah?

read imaginatively - but curb the curiosity

read concentrically – see *a* story in light of *the* story

read christocentrically – not just forwards, but backwards (in the OT) through Jesus

Exodus?

Nehemiah?

With the narrative genre, a story is being told. The Bible is built on a narrative frame.

Immediately a host of characteristics surface:

- + the narrator - the one telling the story
- + the scene - the basic structure of the story
- + the point of view - the perspective from which the story is told
- + the setting – the place in which the story is taking place
- + the plot – the beginning, middle, and end of the story
- + the characters – the people in the story
- + the dialogue – the conversation in the story
- + the style – the rhetorical devices in the story [repetition, chiasm, inclusion]

Locate the narrative on the historical timeline

know your empires add in your 'Ex's keep one eye on the prophets

Locate the narrative in the progressive flow of salvation history. Affirming the importance of a 'theological' context – and of what is often referred to as *biblical theology*: “that branch of theology whose concern it is to study each corpus of the scripture in its own right, especially with respect to its place in the history of God’s unfolding revelation” (DA Carson). It helps us think in categories that bestride both testaments: God’s word, God’s mission, God’s promise, God’s grace, God’s people, God’s glory etc. And it helps us see the progressive revelation at work in themes like land, temple, rest etc.

Individual narratives need to be read at three levels: (a) the story itself – where we value the author and we don’t ride all over them with our own agenda; (b) the way it fits into Israel’s history; (c) the way it fits in with the ultimate narrative of God...

Exodus?

Nehemiah?

Have a bias towards preaching narrative as narrative – but embrace some cautions as well
Allowing the 'means' to eclipse the 'end' – the performance to eclipse purpose – “I find this to be one of the chief dangers of narrative preaching: the goal of the telling will disappear under the overt pleasure of the telling itself” (Holbert, *Preaching Old Testament*, 115).

Losing the leanness – that dense 'plot clot' or the 'commentary-clotted sermons' (Calvin Miller): introducing side issues, altering the story, using unfamiliar words, asking questions of hearers, over-illustration, too many details etc

Succumbing to an uncontrolled imagination

“No Biblical narrative was written specifically about you ... Just because someone in a Bible story did something, that does not mean that you have either permission or obligation to do it too” (Fee & Stuart, *How to read the Bible for all its Worth*, 85-86).

Preach from full narratives – not partial narratives – so the text will tend to be a large one

Some favourite sermon series from old testament narrative...

- b. the prophetic genre
with special reference to *Amos and Malachi*

Place the prophet in his context

Historical the empires and the Ex's

Exodus, an act of grace as God passed-over

Exile, an act of judgement as God passed-through

Literary read (and preach) the prophets as collections of *oracles*..

Theological in relation to the flow of the history of salvation, from Genesis to Revelation

Around the Exodus, apostasy was the issue. After the Exile, apathy is the issue

How does the message change in each context?

pre-exilic

exilic

postexilic

Preach the prophets as *oracles* as they are anthologies, collections of material which are grouped pretty loosely together – and ensure the tone of the sermon matches the mood of the oracle. Take care how you apply 'oracles of judgement to today' ... it is first a word to them before it is a word to us and so linger in the historical context for awhile and do not bolt superficially into the 21st century. Leave room for the possibility of 'reluctance' in the face of 'repentance' (Jer 18:7-8). And make space for messages of hope

Amos? Malachi?

Free the message to sing and to sting; 'to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable'; the difficulty of preaching an uncomfortable message in today's consumerist, seeker-friendly context which does not want to hear it. God is not some 'detached, emotionally neutral, impassive God' who views the breaking of his law to be something akin to the way we can view driving above the speed limit.

Amos? Malachi?

Remain consistent with the identity and the calling of the prophet

they are called *by* God to speak *for* God *to* his people

they are forthtellers of the divine message long before he is the foreteller of the future

They declare God's will to the people – they go, and stay, online to God - they render God's point of view. I like what I call Fee/Stuart's "2:5:1 observation": less than 2% of Old Testament prophecy is messianic; less than 5% specifically describes the New Covenant age; and then less than 1% concern events yet to come.

they are a mouthpiece looking to remind, rather than instruct; reform, not innovate

they are 'the most forceful revelation of God's personality' (Yancey)

they are 'covenant enforcement mediators', speaking for God with an unoriginal message (Fee/Stuart)

they are 'counter-cultural trouble makers' (Longman)

they are 'God's prosecuting attorneys' (Carter, Duvall, Hayes). The major areas on indictment are idolatry, social injustice, and religious formalism. Effective preaching on the prophets will courageously and carefully identify the presence of these three in contemporary society.

they see with an x-ray vision into present and future (Yancey)

they 'witness to the power, pain, purpose, and presence of God in human affairs' (Bruggemann) and speak of a different way of living in the world.

persuasive preachers emotive poets dramatic actors caring pastors

Amos? *Malachi?*

Find God in the text and preach him in all his fullness: the God of justice ... the God of grace

Amos? *Malachi?*

Theologically, we need to know Deuteronomy well to preach the prophets well.

Struggle with the necessity of application

It is first a word to 'them' before it is a word to 'us'. Make space for multiple fulfilments. Like climbing a summit that from end-on looks very close, but then as the journey takes place there are lots of ranges to climb along the way; 'head-on' view vs 'side-on' view.

Be Warned! Daring images and metaphors at work. Society cherished three things above all else – 'wisdom, wealth, might'. The prophets blasted these as the idols which they are.

Take Care! The first instinct with application today must NOT be with a focus on the nation, but on the church. The first speaking of the prophecy included the people of God – the first listening of those prophecies today need to be by those people.

Some favourite sermon series from the prophets...

c. the wisdom genre

with special reference to Ecclesiastes

The writers of wisdom do things differently. This is Israel's effort to affirm that God can be found in everyday life. The perspective is on this life, not the next one. The desire is to encounter God in the here and now, in the joy and in the suffering. When this is done what flows out is something very different from epistles or narrative or law.

Wisdom, with its proverbial sayings, is:

- + 'a short sentence founded upon long experience, containing a truth' (Crenshaw)
- + 'an inexact statement pointing to the truth in figurative ways' (Fee & Stuart)

+ ‘observations learned from a wise and careful look at life ... in light of divine revelation’ (Stein).

+ is a pithy statement - like the cartoon or the joke or the commercial or the number plate or the billboard or the t-shirt

Here is where we welcome the sage alongside the shepherd, the servant, the steward as elemental biblical images of (pastoral) leadership. Alyce McKenzie, in *Hear and Be Wise* writes of our culture being one which ‘craves sages’. The 1960s told us to be prophets ... the 1970s focused on being therapists ... the 1980s told us to be church-growth consultants ... The 1990s told us to be CEOs and player-coaches ... *“I am convinced that this is the era of the sage”* (McKenzie, 1). So put biblical wisdom in dialogue with today’s sages.

Ecclesiastes?

“To be a sage, you had to work hard and work continuously. You had to be alert to your context and flexible and responsive in how you brought the wisdom traditions to bear on it. Your goals were peace in family and community, character building in habits of restraint and integrity capable of minimising the chaos of life, survival in complex and dangerous political situations, and preservation of the community’s religious identity in times of oppressive occupation” (McKenzie, 6).

What features stand out to you from this description of the sage?

.....
.....
.....

Preach them as a collection, as they gather around certain themes (money, marriage, hard work/laziness, honesty, good speech, gossiping, friendship, concern for the poor, justice).

Deepen the appreciation for how the four main books complement each other. Proverbs is the ‘default setting’ on wise living – ‘the rational, ordered approach to life’ – and the others (Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) are exceptions and limitations to that life. There is an integrated and diverse ‘whole’ here.

Retain the mood at all costs – confusion? doubt? cynicism? No glossing and flossing! No make-overs! Don’t twink the inherent authenticity in these books.

Wisdom is not about legal guarantees from God. They are not law. They are not expressing universal truths that apply in all circumstances. Don’t preach in a way that creates unfair burdens for listeners. They need a wider canonical context. Don’t build huge sermons on them. (For example, Proverbs 1:33; 3:9-10; 10:3-4; 13:21; 15:1; 16:3; 22:6)

When I look out into our world and look deep into peoples’ lives and see the trauma that they encounter I am amazed that pastors and preachers in New Zealand today do not spend more sustained time opening up the wisdom, the poetry, and the prophets of the Old Testament. I can think of no better place in the Bible to begin in order to grab peoples’ ears, echo peoples’ hearts and resource peoples’ lips ... and from there lead them to Jesus.

cross-country to christ

In 2008 I gave myself a challenge. Given the discomfort which people have with the Old Testament, I determined to preach a series in which I used an entire OT book as the text for the sermon and then I attempted to go cross-country to Jesus at the end of each sermon *and do it in a different way each time.*

with Exodus...

I focused on God as the hero of the story (designing a destiny, appointing leadership, freeing people to worship, guiding and providing, making contracts ...) and then I used Exodus 33:12-23 as my *bridge passage* and the God who refuses to reveal his glory to Moses. This refusal was lifted in John 1:14 where we discover the truth-full and grace-full Jesus to be the revelation of that glory of God. John 1:14 becomes a 'table of contents' for a Gospel in which we discover Jesus to be designing destinies, appointing leaders, freeing people to worship, guiding and providing and making contracts with people ... John as fulfilment of Exodus?

with the Psalms of Ascent...

I plunged the depths of the emotion in which virtually every psalm is borne: lying, fear, hatred, anger, despair, injustice, guilt, pride... And then how - still deeper than this emotion, at bedrock - we find the living and active God: protecting, showing mercy, helping, restoring, judging, forgiving, stilling... Then my *bridge passage* was Luke 24:13-35 where despairing hearts make way for burning hearts because minds (not hearts!) gain a deeper understanding of the Jesus revealed in their Bible.

with Amos...

The God of Justice is every bit as important as the God of Mercy. The searing judgements on the people of God are heard, particularly as they came through the images of the plumbline, the basket of ripe fruit, the sieve - just before being arrested by that merciful Amos 9:8b ("yet I will not totally destroy...") and the images of hope which then take over: the tent and the vineyard. Then I crossed over to another image, the image of the cross: the cross "where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet." My *bridge passage?* Acts 15 and the way James uses Amos' tent to resolve the biggest crisis the church has ever faced: do Gentiles have to become Jews on their way to becoming Christians? I am still reeling from the revelation that in the climax of a book with such judgement is found the passage that provided the rationale which enables me to be part of the people of God because of the cross.

with Ecclesiastes...

Here we find some pre-evangelism. I like to focus on the three-fold refrain which repeats and which exposes life for so many even today: (a) it is smoke-like ("vanity"): there is nothing left IN it; (b) there is no gain: there is nothing left OVER from it; (c) it is "under the sun": there is Someone left OUT OF it.

The writer exposes such a life on the way to providing an alternative in living in the fear of God. Ecclesiastes 11 becomes his climactic response stacked as it is with imperatives ... while also serving as a *bridge passage* which opens the way to hear John 10:10 in such a fresh way:

"I have come that you may have life and have it to the full", thereby undermining (a),(b), and (c).

with Nehemiah...

We find ourselves in the final story of the OT, a story of renewal with seasons of sowing (ch1&2) and nurturing (ch2&3) and weeding (ch4&6) and pruning (ch5) and blossoming (ch7&8) and ripening (ch9-12) as a people are re-established in Jerusalem as the worshipping and consecrated people of God.

BUT there is a 13 - a chapter 13. It is the *bridge passage*. Here is yet another season of withering as the people fail yet again. As the curtain falls on the OT, the orchestra in the pit starts playing "There is a redeemer" as the Jesus of Hebrews - the "once for all", the "better", and the "how much more" Jesus is anticipated and able to deal decisively with this endemic sin-problem.

with Malachi...

The debate between God and his people is heated and even sarcastic. It is disturbing. After their long history with God the people do not seem to have a handle on his love, his worship, their promises, his judgments, his blessing - or their own service of Him. It is a mess. But the 'Day of the Lord is coming' when the mess will be sorted out. But thankfully - and graciously - before that Day, the prophet will come (4:5).

Here is the *bridge passage* with the prophet being John the Baptist, most famously known as the one who prepared the way for Jesus. The salvation found in this Jesus enables us to prepare for 'the Day' with far greater assurance and even excitement.

b. the distinction

In biblical preaching, how do we view the text?

always like the cover photo of a jigsaw puzzle – or could a wasgij be appropriate?

always like the painting in the art gallery – or could the ol' polaroid be appropriate?

always like the prescription to the chemist – or the growing diagnosis with the doctor?

always working with it to build a sermon building – or birthing a sermon baby?

Must it look like this:

A proposition

I.

A.

B.

C.

1.

2.

3.

... or could it look like this?

1.

2.

3.

A.

B.

C.

I.

A proposition

This characterises something of the distinction between deductive and inductive.

We see the difference when we place Paul preaching in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13) next to Paul speaking in Athens (Acts 17). What do I mean?

We see it when Nathan confronts David. What would a deductive message have sounded like – and what reaction might it have received?

A deductive pattern 'leads down' from the text to the listeners, whereas an inductive pattern 'leads toward' the text after lingering with the listeners. Lewis & Lewis express this distinction in this manner:

Deductive preaching starts with a declaration of intent and proceeds to prove that the validity of what the preacher says is already determined to be true. Inductive preaching, on the other hand, lays out the evidence, the examples, the illustrations and postpones the declarations and assertions until the listeners have a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications and then come to the conclusion with the preacher at the end of the sermon¹

They refer to Jesus as the "Master Model". They make a case for him being primarily inductive with the crowds in his preaching and then deductive in his teaching with the disciples.

Jesus used two distinct styles of communication, depending on the situation and audience. He did sometimes use a didactic, deductive approach – but only when

¹ Ralph Lewis & Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching* (Crossway, 1983) 43 – see also "Checklist of Inductive Characteristics" 194-196; "A Strategy for Making Traditional Sermon Structures Inductive" (Appendix 4)

speaking to his disciples and other believers. When he spoke to the public, to the multitudes, his approach was *always* indirect and inductive.²

Deductive preaching is more left-brained with its analysis, facts, rules, abstractions, and concepts. Inductive preaching is more right-brained with its narration, intuition, and integration.

Deductive preaching is very direct, keen to nail everything down so very clearly. Inductive preaching is more indirect, content with an “up-in-the-air” open-endedness and ambiguity.

Deductive preaching begins with the text and comes to the people. Inductive preaching tends to begin with people and then come to the text, taking their story to the Story.

Deductive preaching tends towards the hortatory and the imperative, while inductive preaching leans towards the descriptive and affirmative.

Deductive preaching is like following an architect’s plan. Inductive preaching is like following a road map.

Inductive preaching is associated with the methods used by a doctor when presented with an illness that requires a diagnosis, before visiting the chemist for a deductive-looking prescription addressing the prognosis.

If Paul specialized in anything, it would have been deductive thinking (although he was also inductive). Jesus, on the other hand, was a master of the inductive approach (although he was also deductive).

In deductive preaching the text is treated a bit like the ever-present picture from which the jigsaw puzzle is deduced. Inductive preaching, however, prefers to complete the jigsaw puzzle *without* the picture present, letting that picture emerge as the sermon proceeds and deliberately involving listeners in that task.

In deductive preaching the text is like a painting already completed which is now being analysed by the art history students clustered around it. In inductive preaching the text is more like a polaroid where everyone gathers around to see the picture gradually emerge – waiting and wondering what it will look like.

The deductive sermon tends towards having people listening in - more as observers. The inductive sermon deliberately aims at having listeners participate more in the sermon - “drawing people into a process of thinking their own thoughts.”³

c. the plunge?

When it comes to making a start, there’s only one way that I know...

Begin with a blank sheet of paper and “brainstorm to create branches” in your most creative moments of the day – and involve other people in the process if at all possible. Maybe do the First Fifteen on a verse/passage in order to create a proposition – or just have a Proposition in mind ... and put it in the middle of a piece of paper – *and brainstorm!*

² Lewis & Lewis, 75.

³ Lucy Rose, “The Parameters of Narrative Preaching” in Wayne Bradley Robinson (ed) *Journeys toward Narrative Preaching* (Pilgrim, 1990) 40.

So, for example, here is a deductive sermon from Ecclesiastes 4 with clear “suburbs” (main points) and “streets” (sub points). But it could be three different inductive sermons, developed in this brainstorming manner...

Ecclesiastes 4: 1-12

Three photos (“I saw”) . . .

A. The Oppression of the Powerless for whom there is no Comforter (4: 1-3)

A caption: This is life “under the sun” (1,3)

A conclusion: Better to be dead or to stay unborn (2,3)

B. The Rivalry amongst the Envious for whom there is no Rest (4: 4-6)

A caption: This is “chasing after the wind” (6c)

A conclusion: Better to have one handful with tranquility (6a)

C. The Loneliness of the Successful for whom there is no Companionship (4: 7-12)

A caption: This is “meaningless . . . miserable” (8d)

A conclusion: Better to have two rather than one (9)

Some Possibilities

- (i) For ‘let’s start with a text from our world’ ... “do an Acts 17” in our own day
- (ii) For ‘a truth too commonly heard’ ... and we need to jolt people into hearing it afresh
- (iii) For ‘a truth not easily owned’ ... and we need to squeeze it in the back door

OR...

- (iv) When we are given a shortened time frame – less than 12-15min.
- (v) When we are in the ‘public world’ – school assembly, rotary club, prison/hospital etc
- (vi) When we have a family service, ‘seeker service’ etc
- (vii) Whenever we are dealing with people further up The Engel Scale...

Can the sermon be classified as ‘biblical’ if, rather than engaging the text all the way through the sermon, it only does so in the final, climactic, and persuasive end point?

Some Cautions

- (i) Will the people of God grow up to maturity on a diet of inductive preaching?
- (ii) Is this not a ‘sell-out’ to the self-absorbed center of contemporary culture?
- (iii) Is this not all priest – and no prophet?
- (iv) Will it not lead to Luther’s accusation: “your thoughts about God are too human”

See the “four shapes” sheet...