

Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Foreword | ix |
| Acknowledgments | xiii |
| Introduction: The Call of the Preacher | 1 |
| <i>Chapter 1</i> Getting Started: The Basics for Sermon Preparation | 19 |
| <i>Chapter 2</i> The Proposition and the Subject: Setting the Course | 33 |
| <i>Chapter 3</i> The Antithesis: The Condition that the Sermon Addresses | 53 |
| <i>Chapter 4</i> The Thesis: The Direction and Focus of the Sermon | 73 |
| <i>Chapter 5</i> The Relevant Question: Maintaining the Sermon's Integrity | 93 |
| <i>Chapter 6</i> The Synthesis: The Body of the Sermon | 111 |
| Epilogue | 131 |

Introduction: The Call of the Preacher

Throughout our quiet hillsides, our tidy suburbs, and the concrete canyons of urban America, the thousands of sermons preached to waiting congregations remain one of the most regular and familiar acts of communication that take place in our country. Moreover, in terms of the sheer numbers involved, the persons present, the organs, utility bills, salaries, printing, parking, and offerings received, this religious exercise ranks with any other frequent gathering in the country—horse races, bowling leagues, basketball games, rock concerts, and prize fights. This weekly pause to celebrate our faith and to receive a twenty- to thirty-minute homily on the God-human encounter is a fixed aspect of the culture.

Every preacher has his or her own way of dealing with those awkward, long minutes at the church exit, when the service has ended, as the worshipers slowly depart. Even after years of experience, trying one tasteful response after another, week after week, hardly any preacher feels a whit more comfortable listening to what seem like perfunctory, polite, and pious exit remarks that are often accompanied by a pusillanimous handshake. What we should take seriously, however, are some of the reports that we happen to hear about other preachers' sermons: "I listened hard, but I really could not follow." "I heard the subject, but then I heard no more about it." "That text I love, but what on earth was the preacher doing with it last Sunday?" "I thought that sermon would

never end. It kept circling round and round and finally ran out of gas." "Our pastor is good with children and the sick and with going out in the community, but I go to church to get something special, and Sunday after Sunday I come home empty." "Today the sermon was great. Why can't we get that kind more often?"

Given the burden that rests on the preacher, and the heavy freight that the Sunday sermon must carry, there ought to be a constructive way of discussing its preparation with candor and charity. Any exercise as important as preaching deserves careful and penetrating scrutiny, an endless search for an evaluative instrument, and a strategy for continuous improvement.

Furthermore, we are serving a generation in the 1990s that has been denied much of the moral and spiritual ballast that previous generations inherited, and we should be trying hard to provide the guidance and stability that they need as so many of them drift without map or compass. Their spiritual confusion is reflected in their easy susceptibility to chemical dependence and their use of sex for amusement and recreation. The consequences abound in unbelievable social pathology, frightening crime statistics, and disastrous family life. Career development around the ideals of commitment to service and successful child rearing is no longer a priority but a casual option.

The challenge to the church and the pulpit is magnified by the promulgation of violent hedonistic and narcissistic lifestyles under the pervasive, aggressive dominance of commercial television. National heroes are packaged for us by the advertising industry and presented for adoration and imitation, and role models are promoted who blatantly violate the finest and the highest that the human race has achieved and that our religious traditions have embraced.

The stakes are high, and the prizes we seek are precious indeed. God has revealed in Jesus Christ a paradigm of personal, spiritual, moral, and social excellence; also, the high promises of human potential in Christ call us to strive toward

a genuine community to supplant our hatreds, our racism, our tribalism, our classism, our sexism, and our idolatrous nationalism. Further, the possibility of finding an elevated sense of transcendence; of connecting to the eternal in the midst of our grinding, demanding contemporaneity; of rising above the stifling requirements of our culture and our life's situation and finding tranquility, meaning, and purpose in communion with God always awaits us. The invitation to accept God's forgiving grace and to experience the total restoration and renewal that Christ affords us, individually as well as in fellowship with others, is extended constantly; and the disciplined application of the imperatives of the kingdom of God to our social, political, economic, and educational institutions challenges our creativity and our Christian commitment. These prizes require that the church, with its treasure of the gospel of the Son of God, should become the supreme agent for the transmission and inculcation of these values in our time.

Because I study and teach about the ministry of the churches, I have often asked persons who attend church regularly what the sermons did for them. Far too many respond that the real benefit is negligible. They look elsewhere: to television "pop" psychologists, *Readers' Digest*, newspaper columnists, and well-read friends for answers to those life-size questions that sermons should try to resolve. But from those who do hear helpful sermons, the gratitude is enormous! Indeed, many are greatly benefited by inspired, relevant, resourceful messages that target real issues, problems, dilemmas, frustrations, dead ends, confusion, and ordinary moral and spiritual exhaustion.

One comment from a respectable, faithful church attendant was that during twenty years of listening to a devoted pastor, she could not recall *one* sermon that seemed coherent, interesting, or helpful. One wonders if anyone ever told that preacher how widely these sermons missed the mark. Was this pastor ever made aware of the hunger that was not satisfied, the thirst that was never quenched?

For most of my youth, as I think of it, most sermons meant little, if anything at all. My recollection is of dull, forty-minute discourses that practically no one really listened to attentively. It was like a private monologue, and it seemed copied from an old book, something addressed to another age and to another people. It went over, around, and past all of us until near the end, when it became louder, rhythmic, and threatening. Mostly, when people raved over a preacher it was because he (hardly ever a she) was a good comic, an entertainer who dealt with spiritual matters with a light touch. It was like a folk festival. Pathetically, however, those persons with deep needs who were least able to cope with life's challenges often went to church, where an untrained, uncommitted pastor was a financial parasite who left them with the most confusing and contradictory religious ideas. They frequently ended up in furious, uninformed barber-shop and beauty-parlor Bible debates.

After half a century of close observation from the inside, five images of the work of the preacher have remained dominant:

1. First, there is the comfort dispenser whose total task is like that of Tylenol: to stop the pain. There is indeed a place for "green pastures and still waters," but such is not the whole of life's terrain. Every worship service should minister in some way to our fretfulness and anxiety, our bruises and our bleeding—but we need more to cope with life's other needs.

2. Next is the pedantic dilettante, the "scholar" who wishes most to be known as bright and well-informed. This preacher keeps the congregation feeling dumb and diminished because the preacher knows so much and they so little.

For seventeen years my loyal sermon critic at the Abyssinian Baptist Church was a serious, disciplined, devoted deacon who fled a mob in Mississippi at age twelve and had completed only three years of schooling. His comments always reminded me of the various verbs that were translated from one language to another as "I know." In Latin there is *cognosco*, "I know"; and there is *scio*, "I know." In French

there is *connaître*, “to know”; and there is *savoir*, “to know.” The first verb means “to recognize”; the second verb means “to comprehend, to understand thoroughly.” My Mississippi fugitive deacon did not have time to collect much *cognitive* knowledge—not much *cognosco* or *connaître*—but he picked up an awful lot of *scio* and *savoir*. And he could tell me succinctly what the sermon accomplished and what it failed to accomplish.

The preacher who sets out primarily to display erudition does a disservice and leaves the sheep still hungry. Intellectual depth is revealed in more subtle ways than simply reminding the people of how bereft of learning they are. A friend of mine often says that Jesus asked us to feed his sheep, not his giraffes!

3. Third is the social prophet, the one who every Sunday looks at the failures of the institutions of society and the unraveling of the social fabric. Indeed, courageous criticism of public discord is in keeping with Isaiah, Micah, Amos, and Jeremiah—and was very much a part of Jesus’ ministry. Someone needs to stand on the wall and cry “Woe!” However, along with this social and prophetic word, the people need education in religious matters and comfort in life’s crisis moments; they need to be given an impetus to serve, to participate, and to create alliances to address the issues that are so glaring in the pastor’s sermons. So the social prophet must remember the total menu and the need for a complete diet in the weekly sermons.

4. The fourth is the Bible repository—one who seeks to be an expert on the content of the Book. Sermons from this preacher are loyal reproductions of biblical scenes and doctrines that sustain real living through interpretation, application, and celebration.

Knowing the Book is great and necessary, but knowing the God about whom the Book speaks and the Christ who is its center is the ultimate objective. The two preachers whom I recall as being uniquely the meanest to their wives and children were among the best Bible scholars I ever knew.

Many years ago I was asked to address an ecumenical conference in Switzerland. A fellow participant was the pastor of one of America's largest congregations in a major city in the South. The pastor was a well-known biblical expert who preached as he held a Bible in the original languages, Hebrew and Greek. He was also an arch-segregationist and provided biblical authority to challenge school desegregation. His place on this program was due to the heavy financial support that his church provided for the sponsoring body. Space was limited in the guest quarters at the conference site, and he and I ended up as roommates for the week. I rarely saw him, but I do remember his long devotions in the morning and at night, using his Hebrew and Greek texts—and that his huge church barred all blacks from membership.

It is the God-human encounter on which the Bible reports that we are searching for and that lies beneath, behind, and all through the printed word. That encounter goes on. God is alive now, and God today is the same God who was in this encounter before the Bible was written. It was the encounter that caused the Bible to be produced.

5. The fifth and final image is that of a faithful pastor who recognizes those other needs described above and adds one more.

This pastor is able to take ordinary words and, by the mystery of preaching in the Spirit, to lead persons into a relationship with God through the Incarnate Word, Jesus. Out of this experience is yielded the comfort and strength one needs for the journey; an awareness of the wider parameters of religious thought and feeling; a vision of the kingdom of God descending in time, space, and at City Hall; and the urge to say "Have mercy, Lord!" and "Thank you, Jesus!"

A preacher is called by God, set apart, and acknowledged by the church as God's special agent. Some of the most moving words ever written are those describing the call of Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elisha, Saul of Tarsus, Augustine, and John Wesley. We can talk about a call to preach only in the context of believing that God is personal and volitional—not

a cold, impersonal set of theories or axioms—that God is both transcendent, existing apart from us, and immanent, very near to us. Believing that, there is room for us to have a prayer life that is more than an illusion, but an actual communication. Jesus taught us to pray intimately to God as our Father, even in a closet.

Given the reality of such communication between a single human life and the God of all creation, we can talk about a call to preach. God enters history at God's own will and makes known to an individual that he or she has been singled out to be a special agent of the Most High.

Now there are no guarantees. Until one's dying day a preacher will not know absolutely that this call is from God; but one bets a lifetime that it is, and the fruits of one's labor have to stand as the only evidence. One simply proceeds after it is certain that no other work, no other assignment, calls forth one's total energies and commitment like the call to preach. With that, no other guarantees are offered.

Preaching is different from all other familiar art forms. It is often done with such elegance and style that it sounds like poetry. When it flows with rhythm and melodious cadences, it is very close to music. Occasionally it is argumentative, persuasive, and imperative, sounding much like a brief of an attorney in a court trial. John the Baptist, Simon Peter, and the apostle Paul preached the Christian faith into a miraculous religious movement, building on its historical foundation in Judaism. Each had a different focus. For John it was the kingdom of God, for Peter it was the descent of the Holy Spirit; and for Paul it was the resurrected, indwelling, transforming, living Christ.

Today, however, after centuries of the practice of the faith, the evolution of modern medicine, the emergence of the natural sciences, the exposing of God's deepest secrets hidden in physics, biology, and chemistry, and the discovery of the shape and movement of God's planet earth, preaching is different. It is influenced by the flowering of the Renaissance, the iconoclastic Reformation, the revealing Enlightenment

era, the innovative Industrial Revolution, and the unbroken continuity of the church as an institution. It remains the vehicle of the gospel in a post-modern world that hungers for spirituality and meaning. Preaching now is scheduled regularly, usually under contract, and by a trained person with two or three academic degrees. It happens in a building that is heated in winter and cooled in summer, and at an appointed moment in a published order of service. The preacher addresses the same people weekly, customarily for ten to fifteen years, over forty times a year at least.

Unlike John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul, the preacher is generally salaried, with a housing allowance, health insurance, and a pension plan, and most often has a spouse and children. In this context the sermon remains central, but as a quite different invention. It is more than a single proclamation that God has entered space and time in human dimensions, more than an announcement of the presence of the Holy Spirit or the victory of Jesus over death and the grave. It reverberates with these themes, but it expands on them, amplifying them to cover all sorts of issues and their application to life.

As we narrow the focus on the sermon even more closely, in current Protestant usage, it is important to establish some parameters and acknowledge some expectations. For one thing, the sermon is still uniquely a religious statement, dealing with subject matter that relates to things ultimate. It defies triviality. It is a summons to reflect on God and human destiny in a relevant fashion, given the restraints of time and the context of the audience. The sermon also traditionally recognizes the centrality of the Scriptures as the most widely published and reverently received record of the encounter of a holy God with the human sojourn. As such, therefore, the sermon benefits the believing community richly when it focuses on the Scriptures, with its library of history, poetry, biography, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the literature of the early church that lifts up the dynamism of the Holy Spirit. And, with the most earnest accountability, the sermon must

address all of the issues of life in the context of today's realities, understanding that there was a God before there *ever* was a Bible, and that the same God is alive and involved in all creation now.

Such accountability compels the preacher to honor God's truth both in the Scriptures, as well as God's truth found in logic, history, biology, mathematics, biography, poetry, drama, and in all the magic and mystery of the natural order—for Jesus promised that new truth would be given and that the Comforter would lead us to such new truths. Of course, the critical dimension of the sermon is the authenticity of the preacher, the measure of spiritual discipline and prayerful preparation that undergirded the sermon's preparation, and the access to God's presence that the preacher sought long before mounting the sacred rostrum. After all, Phillips Brooks said that it was truth through personality. The personality, of course, must be a fit conveyor of that truth. Preaching is not a recitation or a declamation; it is a proclamation, alive and touched with the finger of God.

With these expectations before us, we are prepared to separate the sermon from all other platform performances and verbal expressions. It is a proclamation of the truth of God, through Jesus Christ, by a preacher endowed with spiritual discipline. The proclamation, informed by the Scriptures, relates to all of life.

Inasmuch as this proclamation goes on weekly, the sermon is obliged to accomplish its purpose within a finite time restraint and with relevance to the context of the hearers. In order to meet these requirements, one has to balance spontaneity and inspiration with the current fixed limits of the assignment.

The sermon is different from other staged events because it seeks to tilt life Godward, to encourage us to answer as we are addressed by God. It has a perpendicular aspect to it, lifting the horizontal, mundane, pedestrian issues of living toward the face of God. It recognizes that we were born to live more than a one-dimensional existence. It urges the listener

to see all of life in the light of God's presence, God's person, and God's power, and not merely in the light of our limited, finite capacity or in the light of our brief sojourn here. When all other specialists have dealt with life's other concerns, we who believe in God recognize that we are created beings, that our great Creator is yet present in the world and has abiding interest in us, and that there is purpose and meaning and direction shot through the entire human enterprise. We resonate to the words of the psalmist: "The earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers" (Psalm 24:1-2, RSV). There is this significant Other in our world, and such a recognition has consequences. It means that God is the principal referent for us in every detail of life. And the preacher has the responsibility for nourishing this kind of thinking.

When the geologist has finished describing for us the various rock formations; the mineral deposits; and the underground rivers, caves, and mines; we walk away with more details, but behind it all we see the mighty hand of God. When the anthropologist finishes outlining the stages of human development, from the moment that *Homo sapiens* stood on hind legs and grunted, to the drafting of the United Nations' Charter, we pause to reflect that God monitored the whole process each step of the way. When physicians and pharmacists, surgeons and nurses have done their marvelous acts of healing and appropriated all of the contributions of microbiology, parasitology, radiology, and pharmacology, we express our thanks, pay our medical bills, and reflect again on the fact that they are servants of a Higher Power, dispensers of facts and details that God wrote into the physical, chemical, and mathematical formulae at the dawn of creation.

When we see squirrels leaping gracefully through the trees, giant oaks slowly waking up in the springtime, golden tassels in the wheat fields bending to the wind's baton, and busy brooks and streams dancing on rocks and glistening to the rays of the sun, we feel like writing a poem or a song. The

psalmist has already declared,

*O come, let us sing to the LORD;
 let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
 let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
 For the LORD is a great God,
 and a great King above all gods.
 In his hands are the depths of the earth;
 the heights of the mountains are his also.
 The sea is his, for he made it,
 and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
 O come, let us worship and bow down,
 let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*

—Psalm 95:1-6

What makes the sermon different? It takes this great physical order that surrounds us and puts God's signature on it. The sermon assures us that this is more than physics, chemistry, and mathematics. This is a spiritual, cosmic gymnasium in which we are placed to become spiritual beings, created to become believers, to undergo our metamorphosis from sophisticated, carnal primates to sons and daughters of the living God. No one in society has as much responsibility as the preacher for altering our perception of the world around us from that of a chemical-physical accident to the handiwork of a loving, caring God.

What makes the sermon so different? When we are persuaded that God has breathed life into all creation, it means that the earth is sacred, entrusted from God to us, to be protected and preserved. It means that we do not have a license to destroy it or exploit it for our own wealth, but we must use it for the enhancement of human life. It has a lot to do with our sense of trust and what we will permit to happen to the earth's resources.

What makes preaching so different? When the economists finish their work in measuring wealth and the means of distributing goods and services, the preacher declares that it

is God who has cattle on a thousand hills. When we have all competed to become wealthy, the preacher reminds us that we have an obligation to feed the hungry and to care for the widows and orphans, that we are only stewards of God's wealth.

Preaching helps us find answers to the mystery of human suffering and misfortune. It calls us to recognize the contract that we have with nature that trades the risks of floods and hurricanes, cancers and strokes for the miracles of lungs, livers, brains, and heart movements, deoxyribonucleic acids, the constancy of gravity, the rhythm of the tides, and the faithful procession of the seasons. The preacher has the burden of interpreting life's annoying vicissitudes and relating them to the larger purposes of God in creation.

One of the most searching questions that every life must ask is whether or not this world is a friendly place. If one does not find an operative, coherent answer to that question, the alienation and estrangement that follow can be pathological. Early in life, at the threshold of reason, one must be exposed to an interpretation of the world that is satisfactory to the mind and the soul. Indeed, in the words of poet John Greenleaf Whittier, within this "maddening maze of things" we need that "one fixed trust" that God is good.

One is fortunate indeed to inherit a preacher who has already found a strong faith in God's divine purpose in the world and who has the skill to share that faith. It makes the world look like a different place. Raindrops look like pearls and the wind sounds like the song of a flute. Snow does not look like an inconvenience but a blanket to keep tiny, potent seeds moist until springtime. A new human life is seen as something more than the result of a random sperm cell fertilizing an egg cell; rather it becomes another miracle of a new creation, gathering the genetic traits of several generations and silently passing them on, like an ocean of memories—hair texture, the gait of the walk, size and color of eyes, timbre of the voice—all picked and chosen from an unseen gene pool to make a new life for the perpetuity of the species.

Preaching puts that kind of interpretation on what happens in the maternity ward. That is what makes it different from all other discourse.

As we look further, preaching speaks to human nature in wonderful ways. A preacher who can tell about how Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery can point to a new possibility for the worst of human failure. A preacher who can see in Mary, the mother of John Mark, a tower of strength to help her son recover from a failure as Paul's helper and to become the first biographer of Jesus and Peter's right hand in Rome—this preacher is able to help countless persons recover from temporary defeat.

Great preaching can present Jesus to the modern mind, transposing him from a world of goats, camels, fig trees, and mustard seeds to a world of crack, teenage gun fights, child abuse, stealing in high places, and education without values, keeping alive his transforming and saving power generation after generation. Preaching can see the work of the Holy Spirit in ancient Asia Minor and be open to seeing the same Spirit in a university, a board room, or congressional debate in a setting two thousand years later.

One of our major pharmaceutical companies was shocked to discover that a vaccine discovered to destroy parasites in expensive Fifth Avenue poodles would also work to destroy a blindness-causing parasite in the river waters near the Gambia, Niger, and Upper Volta. When this was found out, someone at the table moved that the vaccine not be held off the market to wait for a higher demand and great profits, but that it be donated to those countries to check eighty thousand cases of blindness. Someone had heard some great preaching!

We are harassed now with a revival of old-fashioned racial and ethnic strife, the resurgence of tribalism. We need some great preaching here. Young, privileged students leave home for universities of high prestige and great reputation, for high scholarship, and carry with them a package of moldy, hoary prejudices to pollute their college experience. There they may find some professors whose learning is like a commodity,

detached and portable, to be put down or picked up at will, but never processed and internalized. They have not heard great preaching.

One of the great players on the Boston Celtics basketball team, a 1992 All Pro named Reginald Lewis, died in July 1993 while shooting baskets casually in a local college gymnasium. He had suffered a collapse in a March 1993 conference championship game due to a heart ailment, and his career had been interrupted. His death occurred at a time when one talk show after another was exploring racial hostilities and the news reported one incident after another that sparked racial animosities. His death was announced, and for forty-eight hours it dominated four Boston television channels. When a Celtics' press conference was finally held, we saw Jewish executives, Irish Catholic coaches and scouts, assorted white Protestant administrators, and several towering black superstars at the microphones with tearful eyes, trembling voices, and complete loss of composure, telling what a rare and inspiring person Reginald Lewis was: a black star, a millionaire athlete, captain of his team, whose play was sensational, whose manner was humble and poised, and whose family life and community service were exemplary. One could feel a bond of respect and admiration among them of which their tears were only a faint commentary.

There is a basis for community among us. It begins with biology, for we all have a common origin and share the same biological equipment, possibilities, and limitations. Some of us may be wealthy and some even of royal birth, but at bottom we are made of the same stuff and have far more in common than we have that separates us. We also have a common dependence on the physical resources of the planet. In Iowa and Illinois and Missouri, the 1993 floods ignored one's race, religion, political party, age, marital status, sexual preference, income, or education. The waters kept rising and the rain kept falling. Everyone had to beg water from the same truck and get in the same line for vaccinations.

Further, we share the same destiny. After three score years

and ten, life gets precarious for everyone, and our days are numbered. Soon we all “take our chambers in the silent halls of death,” and this reminds us of our commonality. No matter how much we leave or what is spent on our funerals, we are permanently removed, and this frame of clay returns, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and earth to earth.

Beginning with these basic foundations for community, great preaching expands on them and calls on witnesses from the Scriptures, history, literature, and logic and pleads the case for transcending our tribalism and pursuing genuine, inclusive community. Preaching presses on beyond community toward a blessed communion in the Spirit. Preaching is different because it does not stop with a description of our diversity, with a categorizing of our socio-economic classes, with a scale of economic or educational stratification. It continues to show how such diversity can be brought into the harmonious pursuit of common goals, with justice, fairness, and freedom. This is perhaps the greatest challenge to preaching for our time.

It is one of the most gratifying privileges that a preacher could ever expect: to present the claims of Christ in our personal lives and the claims of the kingdom of God in social terms with such clarity and conviction that this creeping tribalism and racism would be seen receding before the rising tide of real community. The sad fact is that too many preachers find their security hiding behind a bibliolatry that substitutes a soft and savory salvation formula for a real call to discipleship to Jesus Christ in our time. Liberation theology has reminded us that it is easier to believe in Christ than it is to follow him. Too many have settled for dominant cultural mores and the terms of respectability as sufficient substitutes for the kingdom of God. They have put their personal comfort level first and perfumed this compromise with holy clichés.

Preaching at its best will begin where the people are and educate them in the possibilities of refined and improved human relations. Then, good preaching will put this issue squarely in relationship to our God-consciousness and show

what God's expectations are. Every aspect of our lives is examined in the light of our faithfulness to God when the preacher is really at work.

Preaching is different in one further respect. As we observed the overt signs of grief and shock over the death of Reginald Lewis in the appearances of the Boston Celtics' players, coaches, managers, and owners, the question was asked by one observer, "Why should such physically strong people be so broken up? Don't they know how real and predictable death is?" Well, in the world of millionaire athletes, it is possible to shield oneself from such news rather successfully until it is one of your colleagues. They had no answer, as one put it, for such a good fellow meeting with such a tragic end at such an early age.

Preaching prepares persons for such because it deals with life's extremities without apology. Preaching is different because it has the audacity to ask us to live as though we had to report to God at any moment. It has an existential quality to it that is a constant reminder of the vertical, heaven-bound aspect of life that intersects with the horizontal and the mundane. It dares to remind us of our tentative state and the transiency of life. But it points us to that eternity that hovers over us, that is always a present potential: to walk with God here and now. It assures us that when this earthly tabernacle is eventually dissolved, we have a building that is eternal. Preaching translates this death business into a known quantity. The mystery is erased, and we are assured that we have already passed from death into life.

In all of these marvelous ways, preaching is different. It looks for possible ways of helping us relate to God. It looks deeply into current experience as well as beneath the pages of Holy Writ, and it seeks to direct our thoughts toward a rich and fulfilling spiritual experience.

This book, therefore, is an effort to promote preaching that will introduce and sustain people in a fulfilling religious experience, a relationship with God that enhances every dimension of life, and a discipleship to Jesus that provides a

paradigm for the daily application and praxis of that relationship. In it I share a method of sermon preparation that I have taught for many years in several seminaries that I hope will be helpful to readers as well. By no means is it presented as the *only* method. Mostly, for those who have no effective method at all, I hope it will prove beneficial.