

## *Preaching for a verdict: Melrose May 08 Eric Kirkham*

In Genesis 3 we note the fall, focus on the temptations, but the fundamental flaw is a loss of trust in God. They no longer trust God and so begin to trust other voices. As we have noted in conversion, we are speaking here to ourselves, to our own people, calling them to find a new trust in God.

*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)*

The normal understanding from the early church is that people will come to belief in God and so the church will grow; that the message of the gospel will convince, convict and convert people into the kingdom and into discipleship for Jesus.

So following on from Deane's discussion paper we ask; "what is an appropriate approach for us that we might see such a fruitful ministry in our own congregations?"

### INTRODUCTION:

It all seemed so easy. Declaration; decision; discipleship.

### 1] Ambassador:

*..., in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5: 19-20)*

As ambassadors God's makes his appeal through us. Note that this is our normal role.

*"The scandal of the church is that the Christ event is no longer life-changing, it has become life-enhancing. We've lost the power and joy that makes real disciples, and we've become consumers of religion and not disciples of Jesus Christ."*  
(John Sentamu, Archbishop of York)

A]. Disciples are primarily ambassadors for Christ, our task is to tell of the reconciliation that Christ has won for us.

B]. We are to recognise who we are, no self-cringing is allowed.

*O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD! (Isaiah 2:5)*

*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:11)*

*... just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. (Ephesians 1:4)*

We need to be ambassadors because of what we are through the merits of God. It is not a boastful proposition but the reality of what Jesus has done for each one of us. John Finney once said, "*Walking into the future means leaving the past behind.*" In Christ we are walking into the future, in that sense the past is no longer living.

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)*

As we stand to preach, despite all our inadequacies we stand as ambassadors of Christ.

### 2] Connection.

We no longer stand 6 feet above correction. An ambassador is not an elitist position. As servants of Christ; we are the ones who were sinners and are now forgiven in Christ. Still we need to connect with our listeners. We do need to build bridges that link us with the one another.

Be sure to speak their language.

Do not talk down to your audience. Refrain from using "you" in an uncomplimentary way.

Rather use "we".

Do not assume that you know more than them, we are not bearers of esoteric secrets.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (Romans 1:19)

Paul is talking about disobedience but the fact remains, the good news about God is plain to see.

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. (Psalms 19:1)

Whilst much of the preaching we read in scripture displays the love and grace of God in the scriptural promises, yet it always moves into the imperative, it requires a response:- **“Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).**

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)**

So we are called to preach for a verdict!

## **PRESENTATION:**

3] Announcement:

We have good news to share – announce it!

*There is no reason why your ministry should not achieve visible results, provided you keep alive within you a sense of the wonder of the facts you preach and of the urgency of the issues with which you deal. Every Sunday morning when it comes ought to find you awed and thrilled by the reflection – “God is to be in action today, through me, for these people: this day may be crucial, this service decisive, for someone now ripe for the vision of Jesus.” (James Stewart “Heralds of God” p. 47)*

That will not happen if we fail to make the announcement of what Jesus Christ has done. No matter on what subject we preach we need always to hurry to the saving action of Jesus and God’s love and grace for us. Preaching is about bringing people to Faith, it’s about declaring the Grace of God available for all, it speaks to our contemporary situations. God in Christ has stood among us, shared our life, died our death and has opened a trail which lead back to God. This Christ event may be recorded in history but it is not locked there. We spend so much time developing resources and language for worship that we forget it all begins with relationship.

Faith in Jesus Christ is required for saving belief. That means it is relational. If the preacher does not speak out in faith, then there will not be true communication of faith. Faith needs to rest on solid foundations, else it will fracture in the crush of life. Faith is always going to be relational; we need to keep close company with Jesus, Lord and Saviour. All preaching should help people walk in close relationship with Jesus Christ.

**‘Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.’ (Romans 10:17)**

Lives are not changed through clever preaching, lives are changed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for us, today. This is the announcement we are to make each time we prepare a sermon.

**For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. (1 Corinthians 2:2-3)**

We are heralds of the message of Jesus Christ. A herald does not need to add to the message. The apostles saw Jesus as Lord of all things; everything was subject to him and this is what the disciples declared. God is only truly known through revelation. As we faithfully hold up Jesus Christ God’s Spirit brings revelations. Announcement becomes an “AH HA!” moment.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

4] The potency of the word.

We need to trust the scriptures; that means we need to read and study them. We need to let the word speak to us before we ever presume to speak from the word.

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

God's desire is for all people to find restoration in/with him. This is the plan and purpose of Jesus Christ. As we preach we can take part in this plan and purpose. God has already designed the word for that very purpose.

5] As God wills. It is not mechanistic.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)

We need to expect God to act, but we cannot direct in what way or time frame he will act. Jesus ministry was to do the will of the Father - our ministry is just the same, to do the will of the Father. We are not called to manipulate results, but honestly leave results to God. A manipulated Christian is one who is still-born. Such a one will never grow on into Christ.

### **We are called to respond to the gospel:**

6] A response to the gospel, not to me/you. Intentional surrender.

We must look beyond the Christ of comfort and see the Father at work, calling us to discipleship. When we use the term Father we are not using a sexist term. It is a Trinitarian formula which includes the Son and the Holy Spirit.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15)

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6)

The call to trust Christ is not simply for comfort but is to a life of obedience.

In thinking about preaching for a verdict we need to be open to possibilities beyond a simple altar call. That is not to discount an altar call, we need to think beyond only that.

After announcing Good news there needs to be opportunity to respond appropriately.

You can do this!

## ***PRAYER***

Holy Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we praise you for your infinite love, calling us to be a holy people and a royal priesthood. We thank you that in every generation you have chosen people to boldly declare your word and be ambassadors for Jesus Christ our Lord. And we gladly re commit ourselves to this task.

We bow in prayer before you and ask that you would anoint us with blessing and fill us with your Holy Spirit. We give over to you anything that would hold us back from the tasks of ministry.

Help us stand in your presence filled with new vision, equipped to serve you alone.

Empower us that we may have the wisdom and discipline to follow where Jesus might lead; and have the courage to announce the message of reconciliation through his life and death. May we relate your wonderful deeds, always giving you thanks for all that has been won through the victory of Christ.

May we continue to grow in grace equipped to proclaim your Gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

In all we do may the Name of Jesus be lifted high and may the ministry entrusted to us be fruitful through your power and strength. This we ask through Jesus Christ the true head of the church. All praise be to him now and always. Amen