

Sunday August 1, 2010
Grove Presbyterian Church

Reflection: Preaching Isn't Dr. Phil

What preaching isn't?

It isn't the preacher up here counseling you. I am not Dr. Phil (I do have more hair).

It isn't Bozo the Clown with store-bought jokes entertaining you.

It isn't me regurgitating the internet with all those emotionally and spiritually laden stories that are so popular.

What is preaching?

Sometimes it is like eating broccoli. You may not like it but it is good for you.

Sometimes it is like brushing your teeth, something you do by habit because you need to.

There is a science to preaching. Or is it an art? Yes to both Or so I'm told. Back in Seminary I never did take any courses on preaching or worship – never was going to do this. But I did later learn there are basic types of sermons.

1. Textual sermons where a word or verse is explicated such as agape-love or shibboleth
2. Pastoral sermons: addressing a pastoral need in the congregation, such as suicide or cancer
3. Expository sermons: bring out theme or general meaning of text, such as forgiveness
4. Topical sermons in which the preacher addresses a subject (social, moral, doctrinal, ecclesiastical) via Scripture, such as sexuality or evangelism
5. Testimonial sermons presenting personal declarations of our experience of Christ, such as the youth will offer next Sunday
6. Narrative and dramatized sermons, where the Biblical story is either told or enacted, leaving the conclusion open ended

First, it really doesn't matter if I please you. My concern is to do right by you by being **fair** to scripture. The old adage says that preaching should afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. Faithful preaching is what got John killed, Stephen killed, Paul killed, Peter killed, Paul killed, Jesus killed...

Hold on now, maybe we should rethink this business. Maybe it is safer to be Dr. Phil or tell jokes.

A friend of mine tells the story of this woman in his congregation who couldn't stand his beard. It really caused a big problem for her. So, after her coming up to him to complain, he told her that if it bothered her that much he'd shave it off. And he did. The next Sunday, after worship, she came up to him again and said, "Now, let's talk about your moustache."

Someone once asked me what would be my ideal worship service. I asked them if they really wanted to know. They did. I said that it would be where we started with a prayer, had a good solid 45 minutes of lecture and sermon, finished with a prayer, and then I'd split. I admit: this is untypical. Perhaps more of you would prefer more singing. That's what tomorrow is all about with Session, to make some decisions for this coming year about worship, music, parking, our sense of community.

I like the meat of the worship and that's going to happen when we get into the scripture.

That's what this is all about. That's why this pulpit and communion table are central and prominent – everything else here – from me to the choir to you all -- is supportive to engage us in the word proclaimed and the word revealed in sacrament. Through Bible and Sacrament, Christ reveals Christ's self to us that we may know Christ and follow Christ.

Now, I prefer using the term 'Reflection.' It helps remind me what I am doing – I am reflecting on the scripture. Which also is why we will try to better train worship leaders in how they lay out the context of the text, encourage them to read from the pew Bibles, and keep our language modern and inclusive.

Second, some have voiced the need for down-to-earth sermons. If that means the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in another – great, I will try to do a better job of connecting the dots. God wants to be intelligible. Lord knows, at times I'm not intelligible.

I was once simultaneously applauded and accused by my High School history teacher of being the most parenthetical kid he's ever met. I've never talked in a straight line in my life. But I'll try to more clearly articulate about what I naturally intuit.

And, third, yes, we hear the desire for more answers. Though you really don't want my answers. I can offer interpretations, point out directions, but you've got to work on how to listen, hear, and respond. If there is a take-away message, that is up to you. Are you willing to hear what Jesus is saying to you?

The analogy holds true: informed patients make for better patients. What can you do to be more Biblically savvy?

We proclaim what Christ, the Word of God, wants for us and from us. John the Baptist is the model for all preaching (both the speaking and the hearing): we must decrease, Christ must increase.

