

## Preaching to Outsiders

-Jon Hand

### **1. Assume non-Christianized people are present every time you preach. If you assume they are there you increase the likelihood that the church people will feel confident to invite them.**

- You can't speak to everyone—not possible! Preach to a specific mindset—not a demographic. Who are the outsiders you are assuming will be in the gathered community? Always keep them in mind as you prepare and plan your services. **Some examples, are they:**
  - Progressive educated professionals who value tolerance and diversity?
  - Bow hunting, beer-league, truck driving, and racecar watching blue-collar workers?
  - What is their mindset: questions, objections, and ideas of what the 'good-life' looks like? What is good news to them? What in the Christian story affirms their values? What in the Christian story challenges their values and assumptions about their lives / world?
- Never assume people know what you mean if you use Christian / theological language. If you use Christian words make sure you define them (**Salvation** – God's project to set the world right) (**Paul** – first cen. leader of the Jesus movement) (**Jesus** – the human face of God) (**Holy Spirit** – the animating presence of God) (**Ephesians** – Paul's manifesto of how early Jesus communities were to organize themselves for action in the Jesus movement.)

### **2. Always prepare your communication(s) with 4 people by your side. Create a specific composite based on those inside and outside your church and stay in conversation with them the whole time. Ideas:**

- One 10-20 years older. One 10-20 years younger. One skeptical agnostic. One political conservative, blue-flaming liberal, and one NDP. One divorced 40 something woman. One single mom with three young kids under the age of 12. What objections do they have? What questions are they asking you? Would they disagree with your applications? Are you responding to the complexities of their life with an unintended cliché? How would they respond to your applications? What 'so what' questions would they ask of your great theological ideas?

### **3. In a secular culture we have to differentiate in our preaching between following Jesus and being religiously and socially conservative.**

- 30 years ago people were not probably Christians because it was boring, today many are not Christians because they think it dangerous to society. We have to show why Christianity is virtuous for everyone and how it creates common good and human flourishing.
- What image of Jesus do we present? Secular people **do connect** with Jesus of Nazareth as a prophet of God who denounced religion, hypocrisy, power, violence, and injustice. They **do not** connect with Jesus of Nazareth as a bible teacher denouncing immorality and unbelief.

### **4. Present a Jesus who offers freedom, new identity, meaning, and community over a Jesus who mostly wants to forgive their sins.** Clearly, it's both. Church people tend to carry guilt and non church people tend to not carry guilt with God.

- Most non-Christians aren't sitting around needing or wanting God to forgive their sins. Many are unknowingly looking in the wrong places for meaning, worth, importance, security and significance..

Secular culture is not a guilt culture (feeling bad for their sins and moral failures) it's a shame culture (feeling worth-less compared to other 'successes' or better-than because of own success. Inadequacy and insecurity (obsession with safety) are the unrecoverable sins of our day. Even arrogance is still a shame cover). Guilt says I did wrong, shame says I'm fundamentally not adequate, enough, or worthy. What does Jesus have to say to these realities? What is his invitation beyond Christ died so you can have your sins forgiven and feel the weight of guilt lifted off your shoulders?

#### **5. *Be authentic about yourself and honest about the human condition.***

- The world is starving for honesty and the church should be leading the way. Your weakness / brokenness can be the doorway for their transformation. When we take the mask off as preachers, the people tend to come out of hiding.
- Tell stories of other's success and your failures—not the other way around.
- Watch the line between authentic and needy. If you need to emote about your failures, you aren't ready to share it from the 'pulpit'. One (vulnerability) gives people courage and the other leaves people feely icky.
- If your preaching is not laced with hope—it's not Christian.

#### **6. *Preach NOT to inform about God but to awaken them to God, themselves, and others: preach to the heart.***

- Preach to the 'thing' (motive) under the 'thing' (behaviour). Jesus was always going for the 'why' behind the 'what'. (ex. Sin is trying to get a legitimate need met in an illegitimate way, or sin is doing bad things for good reasons) Help awaken them to their deeper longings and impure motivations that can point them to Christ.
- Always show why we obey / follow Jesus in a specific area. *Secular people already think Christianity is about people feeling morally superior so the 'bible tells me so' doesn't cut it!* We must show them why we need Jesus to save us from ourselves.
- Don't give people more to "do". 8 steps to.... People can't take in 8 things to do every week from the application section of our sermons. Instead, can you 'invite' them to 'pay attention' to God, to themselves, to others? Give people practices to try that can bring about awareness they currently don't have. Waking them up leads to change.

#### **7. *Sermons need teeth, just don't use it to kick em' in the teeth.***

- Don't should on people! Avoid (F.O.G.) fear, obligation, or guilt to motivate people—that's not grace. Lovingly challenge their excuses and anticipate their justifications.
  - "Some of you say you don't want to bother people with your problems and that's why you don't share your struggles with others, but let's be honest, we both know that's probably excuse to not appear weak." "Some of you are using your gifts in the church but you resent it and judge others for not serving. That's not love because love gives without any strings and if you resent using your gifts your probably not actually using your gifts."
- Give people space to be sinners and be confident in the process of transformation.

#### **8. *Give people what no other cultural institution can give them: community, spirituality, meaning, and lived wisdom.***

- Pastors are meaning makers: Weave God’s story into their story to give meaning to their lives. People need to leave feeling better / more hopeful about their lives than before they came to your worship gathering.
  - Example: Jesus as a single mom.
  - Help them see that God is closer to them and they are closer to God than they realize.
- Not everyone at church comes looking for God, we need to offer them something else until they are ready. People in secular world are taught skills and competencies in higher ed. or trade school, but no one is teaching them how to live well. Preaching should give people counter-intuitive lived wisdom based on the Gospel.
  - Examples: how to love and forgive your enemies; avoiding pain and chasing security only makes your life more insecure; trying to be happy makes it harder to be happy; if you want to be great, humble yourself; how to do conflict; sexual ‘freedom’ can become it’s own form of oppression and subjugation. etc.

### **9. Only say what is true, interesting, and helpful! That’s it!!! Cut out everything else.**

- Who says you have to use Greek words or give 20 min. background on a passage? Say less and be interesting. The iphone is changing our brains. We sift only the info that is interesting (experience) and helpful (experiential) to us.
- Preaching isn’t exegeting a passage—that’s called study. **Preaching is waking people up to Jesus and painting compelling visions of the Kingdom of God breaking into their lives and this world.**
- Caution—Commentaries are written by intellectual Christians to other intellectual Christians.
- Say only what is true, interesting, and helpful for everyday people right now vs. saying what we feel like we ought to say (bible background, greek words, commentary)
- Be E.P.I.C – Experiential, Participatory, Image rich, Connective (see Len Sweet)
  - Ask a lot of open-ended questions? “I wonder if.....” “What do you think about....” “I invite you to imagine.....”
  - Use stories and interviews with real people in your church, both Christian and non-Christian.
  - Bring in pop culture, secular songs, artful images to go along with what your saying.
  - Be spiritual--they are at church so give them the full experience of the gathered Body of Christ—just do it in a way that’s interesting.
- Quote their poets and prophets; start with what is known to take them to the unknown (Christ).

### **10. Always be experiencing, learning, and mining life for new truth.**

- You will have nothing to say if you aren’t always feeding yourself, staying curious, and always taking in new interests and ideas. Most of what we have to offer people will be gone in 6 sermons unless we are constantly taking in new and fresh insights, ideas.
- Read or listen to secular: books, novels, podcasts, book reviews, music, movies. We don’t trust secular culture but we communicate a love for it. Chances are it’s the main thing we have in common with secular people.
- C.S. Lewis said of good writing and it applies to good sermons: Every prayer you’ve prayed; every person you’ve known; every book you’ve read; experience you’ve had; lessons mined from your life; pains you’ve suffered; ways you’ve experienced God all goes into the making of your writing (sermon) voice.