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#### **Ch. 4**

### **SERMON PREPARATION AND PREACHING**

When I became the professor of preaching at Union Seminary, I decided to secure the services of a preaching coach for the enrichment of my skills as a teacher and preacher. Professionals who teach others need to be taught themselves. It is easy to fall prey to the notion that one has found the final form of excellence. Such an assumption clearly is the beginning of the decline in vitality of any art. It is most certainly the case with preaching where freshness of approach is sustained by the constant quest for the "more excellent way." I personally have benefited from the regular critique, challenge, and encouragement of other skilled communicators.

An occasion to team-teach a preaching workshop for Auburn Seminary led me to J. Philip Swander, the person who was to become my coach for several years. He had been one of my speech teachers when I was a student at Union during the late '50s.

I recall that when Barbara Wheeler, president of Auburn Seminary, convened Phil and me to plan our workshop, I sensed right away that the intervening years had brought Phil insights about preaching that were quite different from what I had learned in seminary. The planning sessions were filled with clashing views and competing perspectives. There was even a point when I considered withdrawing from the contract. Barbara, however, skillfully helped us move beyond our differences and we were able to work through what turned out to be quite an impressive workshop design.

During my work with Phil, I became convinced that he was on to something that could make a positive difference in my preaching and bring a fresh contribution to the teaching of this art. Following the course, I asked him if he would be willing to coach me in the Swander method. He claimed not to have such a method, but consented to work with me if I was interested in breaking out

of habits that hinder effective oral communication.

We established regular sessions for a wide range of sermon development exercises. One session would focus on reading the text, another on how to proceed from the text, another on how to identify the sermonic idea. We gave considerable attention to determining the type of exegesis that would be most helpful, while some sessions were spent primarily on aspects of scripting - how to write sermons where the action is as important as the words to be spoken. Still, at other times, work was centered on delivery.

Even though I enjoyed positive response to my preaching, Phil helped me identify areas in which significant change was needed if I were to become a more effective preacher. After extensive work, Phil would accompany me on preaching missions. The feedback from such presentations in the living laboratory would become the focus of subsequent coaching sessions.

I later tested Phil's approach in my own homiletics classes. Convinced of its timeliness and the contribution it would make to the contemporary pulpit, I planned to join Phil in developing a new method in teaching the art of preaching.

Illness, which led to Phil's death in November, 1986, interrupted our collaborative efforts. But my deep and abiding gratitude for his contribution to my development required public acknowledgment.

The Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale was one of the last preaching events Phil attended with me. I had asked him to come along to give greetings. Though weakened by his illness, Phil came and his participation provided a very important dimension of what I wish to say about how the anointing makes the difference in preparation and delivery of sermons.

He prefaced his remarks by saying that when he was invited, "I had the feeling from somewhere that I shouldn't just [come and say] hello, but that I should share with you." Then he read these words of Paul recorded in Romans 8:11-27:

*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.*

*So then, brethren [and sisters], we are debtors, not to the flesh - for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship [and daughterhood]. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit ... bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons [and daughters] of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious*

*liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons [and daughters], the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope.*

*For who hopes for what he or she sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of [human beings] knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

When Phil said he had "the feeling from somewhere" that he shouldn't simply say hello, but should share this passage, he was expressing an awareness that the anointing of the Spirit brings. Phil didn't speak easily about the Holy Spirit in that way. Indeed, he was uncomfortable with glib claims of spiritual unctions. But his comment about a "feeling from somewhere" was accompanied by an upward tilt of his head - the unspoken must be taken very seriously, he always insisted. And those who heard him read the text could bear witness that he communicated a powerful sense of "something within" as he read the passage in which Paul describes the work of the Spirit.

Without doubt, Phil had prepared for the reading of the text, making use of all his insight about oral reading. He taught that preparation of a sermon included serious effort at effective reading of the scripture. A preacher who doesn't respect the word enough to strive for excellence in leading the congregation to hear it doesn't deserve the opportunity to present his or her manuscript as if such words are somehow more important than the Bible.

Moreover, Phil's presentation gave evidence that he was prepared and acquainted with that about which he was reading due to an intimate relationship with the Spirit. Through months of battling with his illness, he had entered a new depth of Spirit awareness. In his own suffering, he had begun to experience a glory and companionship of the Spirit he had not talked about before. With increasing explicitness, Phil had started to share how he was experiencing the Spirit as a source of strength. I would be reluctant to make these comments about my dear friend were it not for the overwhelming corroborating evidence reflected in his reading that night in Marchand Chapel at Yale.

When I review the presentation on videotape, I get a renewed sense of how important it is for preachers to prepare by entering into a knowing relationship with the Spirit about which we speak. Thus a first principle of preparation has to do with experiencing a firsthand ministry of the one who sends the word. Even before we plunge into exercises designed to give technical competencies, we as preachers should open ourselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is foundational for the preparation of every sermon.

Nearly a decade before Phil's memorable reading of Romans 8, I had written a sermon from the same text on how the Spirit sustains our hope. I return now to those words to describe how the Spirit helps to prepare the preacher for the ministry of the word. I believe the anointing of the Holy Spirit helps the preacher to understand the living spiritual encounters that Paul describes in

Romans 8: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (verse 11). Life in the Spirit is the special provision for the Christian by which we are renewed in hope.

The presence of the Spirit will make the difference between our failure and our fulfillment. It was so in the case of Jesus. The Spirit of God snatched the victory from death and the grave and established a firm foundation of hope for the whole creation. If there is to be a victory march at the end it will be through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The link between the work of the Spirit and the Christian's hope is interestingly reflected in the movement of the writings of Jurgen Moltmann. His book *Theology of Hope* gave widespread contemporary expression to the hope motif in Christian theology. Later he gave attention to the reality and centrality of the cross in salvation history in his book *The Crucified God*. But it seemed almost inevitable if he wanted to promote hope that he would have to write another volume emphasizing the Holy Spirit. This he did in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*.

Once again, Romans 8 has anticipated theological and existential necessity. So central is the Spirit in Paul's understanding of the Christian pilgrimage that he says in the ninth verse, "Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." The point of the statement is not to exclude. Rather, the intent is to make clear the basis of inclusion.

Beyond this general statement of the importance of the Spirit, Paul goes on to give some concrete ways in which the Spirit works to help fulfill our hopes. In so doing, he shows special pastoral sensitivity. Those being encouraged to stake their lives on the power and faithfulness of the Spirit would wish for some definite experience to undergird their commitment and trust. It seems there should be some definite way we can experience such power, at least in an anticipatory way. There ought to be some hint in the here and now of that power on which we will rely when death holds us in its grip. If that power cannot lift us above despair, it will be difficult to believe in its power to lift us beyond death. If there is no power to cope with temporal frustrations, whence the force to deal with the eternal negation of death?

Earlier we quoted the negative part of verse 15, but now let us hear the whole verse along with verses 16 and 17. Here we find one of our first insights regarding what the Spirit does to move us toward hope.

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

What is offered here is not the concept of adoption, but rather the experience of adoption. It is in the midst of a mood of abandonment that we are surprised by sounds coming from a deep place within. The sounds express confidence that "this is my Father's world and I am his child." Or, "I was feeling like a motherless child, but now I feel the tenderness of Mother's love." Such sentiments are

not the logical conclusions to an orderly thought process. In fact, the argument had seemed to be going in the other direction. But out of nowhere there is an about-face and then the cry, "My God, my God." How does this happen? It is the Spirit making us remember that Jesus Christ is our elder brother and that the legacy of "glory beyond suffering" belongs to us also. It is this power that calls forth "spirituals" from slaves with chains on their ankles. When the Spirit works like this, hope becomes a real option again. But there's more. The scripture says the "Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought."

This is what Paul had experienced so many times - not the Spirit as a principle of divine activity in human history, but as a very present help in the time of weakness. When the complications of internal conflict robbed him of the right words to pray, the Spirit came to his aid, bypassing his impasses and blending his sighs and groans with the persisting will of God. This freed him to be where he was, with all his doubts and fears, and at the same time kept him open to the invitation to follow the promise to the end.

I have felt the power of the Holy Spirit as a helper in my own prayer life. I remember once when I couldn't find the words to appropriately address the God of my life. I knelt at my bed, stretched forth my arms and moved my shoulders in writhing jerks of anguish. All I could utter were sighs and groans. But afterwards, I felt so much better that I said, "Perhaps I can pray now." But it seemed the Spirit said to me, "You don't need to pray any more now. Heaven is equipped to receive choreographed prayer. Also, your sighs and groans have already been decoded and help is on the way."

Your experiences may not have been like mine, but I believe we all have experienced the Spirit as our help. Perhaps it was by giving us a little more strength when a task seemed more than a match. Or it may have been in struggle for justice when everyone seemed against you and the Spirit helped you endure the isolation. How powerfully Martin Luther King, Jr., witnessed to this kind of help in the midst of his times of stress and strain!

Paul Tillich preached a sermon on spiritual presence in which he enumerated some of the varied manifestations of the Spirit's help:

*The Spirit can work in you with a soft but insistent voice, telling you that your life is empty and meaningless, but that there are chances of a new life waiting before the door of your inner self to fill its void and to conquer its dullness. The Spirit can work in you, awakening the desire to strive toward the sublime over against the profanity of the average day. The Spirit can give you the courage which says "yes" to life in spite of the destructiveness you have experienced around you and within you.*

Each person knows his or her own particular experience of how the Spirit has nourished hope. What we share is the question of how we would have survived without those timely interventions. How important for each of us to know that such help is the normal provision for those whose hope is in the power of the resurrected Lord!

There is yet another way by which the Spirit gives us the courage to hope. I call it the

experience of eschatological epistemology. The mysterious power and weight of this particular experience constitutes a new kind of knowledge that can only be understood from the vantage point of those who believe that the world as we know it must come to an end. Paul boldly asserts this claim in verse 28, saying, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

How can we say "we know" even before the end has come? Things are very much in process, and sometimes our hopes seem to be in the middle of an aborted process. How can we say "we know"? We can say it only because the Spirit, who communicates with us and helps us, seems to know what we do not know, can see what we cannot see. The Spirit sees the future depth implanted in the past and present. The Spirit's relationship to the future exceeds our comprehension. The Spirit has a way of convincing us that the plan of redemption is working and everything will come out all right and that in every threatening thing and in every comforting thing, the Lord is working to fulfill God's promise about what shall be.

Occasionally, saints are given rare previews of the creation set free from bondage. Paul speaks of such a transcendent experience. Most of us, however, are only privileged to see faint intimations of things to come. It may happen as we share word and sacrament, or as we work and reflect on impossible situations. Although we see through a glass darkly, it is enough to quicken our hope. Love's advance disclosures at least let us know the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. It is a kind of end-time knowing, which we can experience through life in the Spirit.

On the basis of eschatological epistemology, Martin Luther King, Jr., was able to say: "I've been to the mountaintop. And my eyes have seen the coming of the glory of the Lord. I may not get there with you, but I know that we as a people will make it to the promised land." When we talk like that, people will ask us, "How do you know?" We can only reply, "The Spirit tells us so," and having reviewed the promises of the word, our spirits have found the courage to join in singing, "We shall overcome!"

A minister who has experienced the ministry of the Spirit as described above already has a headstart for the preaching of the word.

After stressing the importance of the anointing of the Spirit, someone once responded as if I were suggesting that we can be relieved of the rigor and tedium of sermon preparation. "Oh, I just want to thank you for telling us about the anointing of the Spirit. You know, I have always felt that the hard labor of traditional homiletical rules was more than was necessary.... Thank you for showing us how to preach without all that unnecessary toil."

I usually respond to such comments by finding a tactful way of declining the gratitude and explaining that I do not believe the anointing of the Holy Spirit relieves us from the responsibility of thoughtful diligence in exchange for magical toil-free preparation. If we need a proof-text, a better choice would be Luke 11:42c: "these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."

But the anointing of the Spirit undoubtedly assists us and makes the difference in the overall preaching process. We might wonder if, as a result, the preaching will be more lively, or if sermons will become more biblical. We might ask whether such preaching involves more of the preacher's personal experiences, and whether it requires more or less time, or a more or less scholarly approach. There also may be questions about whether the sermon preparation should follow traditional rules of homiletical development. What will the difference be?

One way to respond to these issues is to identify areas of longing regarding improved preaching. We must first identify what it is that we would wish for the strengthening of our preaching. What areas of increased competency would give you personally a greater sense of satisfaction in your moments of proclaiming the good news? What's lacking now? What could be better? Have you had any substantive feedback on your preaching? What intimations of the Spirit have suggested, "Well done, so far, but there is more that can be done"?

Perhaps you desire greater ease in getting to the central idea of the sermon. Do you have trouble finding the illustrations? Would you wish for greater freedom of expression? Do you wish for more depth of analysis, a better sense of timing, or a better structure for your sermon?

I raise these questions because the true anointing will help complete the unfinished dimensions of one's growth process in the preaching of the word. I strongly believe that the anointing of the Holy Spirit can help in very definite ways. When we experience the anointing, we are incorporated into the continuing drama of salvation as it is energized and guided by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, since the anointing is that process by which we come to a fundamental awareness of God's appointment, empowerment, and guidance for the work of the ministry, there is a kind of continuous flow in the process of the Spirit's unfolding of our mission, and of our gifts, and the focus of our responsibilities. The Spirit carries us so forcefully that the traditional distinctions of preparation of the preacher, preparation of the sermon, preparation for delivery, and the delivery of the sermon itself become subsidiary. What is left is a continuous ebb and flow of movement within the power of the Spirit. First with one dimension of preparation and then another, always moving as the Spirit directs.

In other words, for us to be caught up in the Spirit, we must be open to receive with a heightened intensity whatever the anointing power revealed in Jesus the Christ has for us. Our prayer must be that the people who await our return from the ministers' workshop will anticipate greater power in the pulpit, and therefore there will be more strength in the pew for the work we are called to do.

When I think of the anointing and how it affects our preparation, my mind goes back to Howard Thurman. There are interesting similarities between his and Phil Swander's delivery pace. Thurman would stand, wait, and then close his eyes. He would look up and say something like, "Oh Lord, thou hast searched me and known me." And as he continued, something happened to the audience. They discovered a great interest in the one Thurman was looking toward.

When Thurman read Psalm 139, we began to understand part of the sermon preparation

process. It was not so important that we heard or understood all of the words. What was important was that we were moved into a presence. We were enveloped - surrounded by a presence - and what a glorious presence! It was a presence that knows our down-sittings and our up-risings; a presence that understands our thoughts afar off and is acquainted with all our ways.

This presence, as the psalmist notes, was there at our embryonic beginnings, though our existence was not yet visible to the naked eye. It worked with our unformed substance, allowing the process of mitosis to continue - dividing of the cells, so that after the course of time, every member was formed.

And then the psalmist upon whom Thurman helps us to eavesdrop goes on to say, "God was there, helping to make my toes into toes, and my fingers into fingers; my head into a head, and my foot into a foot." That presence was there. And then, this presence followed us all the way. Even when we took the wings of the morning and dwelled in the uttermost parts of the sea, that presence was there. And then, if we made our bed in Sheol, that presence was there too. Even in the conflict with enemies, that presence was there, searching us, lest our hearts be found to have impediments that would block the experience of that presence. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain to it.

This is my way of saying that my understanding of the *anointing is the experience of the presence of the Spirit*. You can see we are not talking about anything new. We are talking about a reality in which and with which you have lived, and moved, and had your being since you began. We are talking about a presence that was with you when you thought you had reached the end of your line; the presence that was with you in the confusion and conflict of adolescence; that shepherded you through the uncertain years of early adulthood; a presence that has been with you all the way from then even until now.

Therefore, it is not appropriate for us to talk about the anointing of the Holy Spirit as if what we have to do is come up with some brand-new language, some brand-new experience; as if you have to take a trip to the East to get in touch with it. What we are talking about is something we already know something about, because our knowing has been in the context of that something. What we are talking about does not require us to ask, "Yes, tell us about that. That's a new idea."

No, we can't be like the little boy whose mother wanted him to ask for the molasses correctly. He kept saying, "Mama, I want some 'lasses" and the mother would correct him, saying, "You mean, molasses." He said, "Well, I can't ask for molasses if I ain't had *no* 'lasses."

If we are concerned about the anointing, it maybe useful to pause and have a doxology, giving thanks to God for the work of the Spirit. "God, thank you that when I was not, your Spirit called me into being. Thank you for healing me of all my childhood diseases that could have taken me away but didn't because of your Spirit. Thank you for being with me in my early development even though I didn't know the names of the soteriological categories. Thank you for safeguarding my pilgrimage to this point. And even though I may not be where I ought to be, thank you God, for you have shepherded me all the way; and because you have brought me all the way, I thank you for being invested in how far I've come. I thank you for the assurance of knowing you will never abandon me."



Each of us can say a similar doxology for indeed God *is* with us. It is this understanding that brings us to sermon preparation. For the sermon begins with the experience and understanding that we live in that presence.

There is another dimension of preparation that focuses on the responsibility of proclamation. For in the anointing we become aware of a fundamental truth: the Spirit is *in the process* with which we are involved. How I love these words of Jesus from John 16:12 - given to the disciples as he prepares to go. He says to them: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, [the Spirit] will guide you into all the truth; for [the Spirit] will not speak on [the Spirit's] own authority, but whatever [the Spirit] hears, [the Spirit] will speak, and [the Spirit] will declare to you the things that are to come." This speaks to me about the work of the Spirit in the process of getting ready for the sermon. Remember, we are already in the Spirit. Therefore, it is just a matter of the continuation of that experience.

I like to think of the Spirit the way Jesus has characterized it. According to this text, the Spirit becomes a director of continuing education for our spirits. We are not beginners. This is not kindergarten. We are already on the way. But the Spirit that brought us this far continues to direct our paths. So preparing a sermon is not done by ourselves. The director, who has been with us all the way, is standing right there with us. We are not in the ministers' workshop alone. The Spirit is there with us.

Have you ever experienced this collaboration? If you have, you'll know that it is much different from working by yourself. Much of the anxiety and dread associated with the preparation process is removed by this experience of collaboration. It enables us to say, "I'm not here by myself. Somebody is here with me in the process." It is as if the Holy Spirit *is* the preacher; therefore, we are honored to have the opportunity to collaborate with the Spirit in this sacred process. This means all of the heaviness and our questions of "Oh, my goodness, what do I say and how do I do this?" are somehow moderated by our tag-team relationship with the Spirit. And oh, what a joy it is to work with this director of continuing education who is able to take on different roles and supply our every need. The Spirit becomes a tour guide, through time and space, through truth and grace, leading us, so we can see, understand, and proclaim what is happening.

This leading is a kind of exegetical process that pulls together our preparation. This tour guide is the master of terrain of all time and experience and eternity. It is out of this data that the sermon event will flow. Sometimes we are taken through death valley - Ezekiel will witness to this - to help us see the reality of our times. At other times, our tour guide stops us on the plain of the seemingly uneventful. Nothing appears to be happening. Nothing is going on in this parish. Nothing is going on in the lives of these people. But the guide will say, "You have missed the pain which is etching the deep valleys in the minds of these people. There is something for us to do here."

Our guide, with us in preparing our sermon, takes us to the New Jerusalem and allows us to see a river flowing through the midst of the streets of the city, with trees on either side, with leaves on the trees for the healing of the nation, and a fruit for every month of the year, and to see the foreheads

of the people, which shine with the seal of God, and light emanating. (Revelation 22:1-5) And we can see this even from the valley of death or the plain of the uneventful. It is the Spirit. The Spirit that helps us to see what we otherwise would not be able to see. The Spirit identifies events that are too important to be trusted to our unaided vision. For we need this glorious bifocality, through which time and eternity are in our view.

Furthermore, Jesus says to us: "There are many things I have to say to you, but you cannot bear it now" (John 16:12). But when the Spirit comes, the Spirit will discern what you are ready to receive - what the time and the context call for. One cannot arrive at point "B" before mastering point "A." Therefore, the Spirit is likely to tell us what dimension of growth we should be entering at a given point in time. We need not feel anxious about being perfected overnight. The fullness of the anointing is experienced gradually, step by step.

It is all right to develop a single point in time and space. Don't *try* to preach ten or fifteen different points. One point can give a portal into the heart of eternity from which all the blessings flow. This enables the preacher to focus and get the right word. We also can see that the Spirit becomes a courier of the word that God sends to us. That is, when there *is* a special word. When there is a word that we otherwise would miss, the Spirit, having brought us all the way, is able to stir our hearts and allow us to hear this word. The Spirit also acts as a kind of cosigner of our "epistles of encouragement," by helping us to reach the hearts and minds of the people.

And yet, the Spirit will not lead us unless we put forth our share of the effort. We may be led to go to the library to research a topic. We maybe led not to only read that book we were seeking, but to dig deeper. After much searching on our part, the Spirit may help us to find a totally different source that is most valuable to our efforts.

Through this collaborative process, we begin to enjoy preparation. Some of my heightened moments of excitement, which often exceed the excitement I've experienced during the actual preaching, were had during the stage of preparation. Sometimes it is so exciting to have the Spirit guiding me as I prepare to preach that I have to stand up and walk around a little bit because it is so hot, so intense, when the anointing brings the collaborator into the process of "getting the sermon out."

But finally, there's a time when the sermon must be preached. By the aid of the Spirit, the sense becomes apparent that "this is the word that ought to be said." At this time, the Spirit even helps us to deliver the sermon. In Acts 10, Peter, who already had experienced this visitation on the day of Pentecost, is able to sense what this collaboration is all about. At Cornelius's house, the people experience the presence of the Spirit. As Peter is moved to go to Cornelius's house and begins to preach, he tells the others that he has come to realize God is no respecter of persons and that they must know that in any place where there are those who are the upright and who are listening to the voice of God, God receives them Peter went on to talk about Jesus and how *he* was anointed. As he preached, something happened that I believe is particular to the moment of the anointing. While Peter was preaching, the same Spirit that brought him to that place and prepared him, also prepared the people. The anointing in the pulpit is by the same Spirit effecting in sense of "bringing about" the anointing in the pews. If it is not happening in the congregation, even if it appears to be

happening in the pulpit, it will not be the moment of preaching we anticipate in the power of the Spirit. In this situation, God had been at work within the worshipers at Cornelius's house as well.

It is the task of the Spirit to convene the community of those who are being made ready. It is the work of the Spirit to lead us in the moment of proclamation, to guide us even beyond our own inclination. It is the Spirit at work, enabling preachers to do their part, but at the same time, connecting with what's happening within the listeners.

Peter experienced the outpouring of the power of God in the midst of that community. The authenticity and integrity of that community were powerfully confirmed by the Spirit. The community was strengthened, and Peter was invited to stay so that he could talk about the implications of what had been going on there.

This means the anointing is not just manifested in a heightened moment of excitement, but it lingers for the teaching moment - to talk about the implications of the experience. A liturgical moment follows as Peter baptizes the people. He engages in a little ecclesiology. "Can we forbid these to be baptized, who have experienced the Spirit even as we have?" (Acts 10). This is the anointing which we must appropriate to develop the quality of our preaching.

If we preach out of the experience of the anointing such as is described in Jesus the Christ, and if we appreciate the nurturing that shapes our very lives, and if we experience the Spirit as a collaborator in the process of normal preparation, we can expect to receive the text and message that is sent by God. Sometimes this is given through the lectionary or by way of the events of the time. It also can be given by the underscoring of meaning in our own lives.

I could have discussed questions often brought up about the exegesis or about word studies. I could have talked about use of reference materials or finding sermon illustrations. Discussion could have been given to structure, whether it be narrative in form, or reveal inductive style. I could have talked about all that. But these dimensions are given within the superintendency of the Spirit. It is most important that we first allow ourselves to enter into the collaboration to achieve fervent and life-transforming preaching.

To be sure, we as preachers must enter a contract with the Spirit. We have to agree to cooperate and allow ourselves to be used by the Spirit. Preachers nourished in the Pentecostal tradition used to sing the song simply entitled "Yes." We must be able to say "yes" to the Spirit - and mean it! "Yes, I'll say what you want me to say. I'll do what you want me to do. Yes, I'll be governed by your power in my daily life as I communicate the word." We even may need to ask the Spirit to help us say yes, to teach us to yield to the leading of the Lord. This is part of what happens when the anointing becomes real for us.

Then once we have contracted with the Spirit, we need to contract with the task. We preachers should individually arrive at the point of determination where each of us can say, "Yes, I'll do it." Too often we struggle because we haven't gotten to this point. It is difficult to be about a ministry of preaching while still being reluctant to do it. Let me be clear on one point. We don't have to *want* to preach But we should be willing, for there is little rest for the anointed preacher who

resists the mandate. As Paul said, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (I Corinthians 9:16c).

Once we consent, we are to surrender all we have to the process. Psalm 103 encourages us to bless the Lord with all that there is within us. Even the resources around us should be incorporated in our preaching. We should learn to make use of whatever is present in the setting, as well as work

around possible obstacles. It is best to allow time before the event to check details such as lighting, ventilation, and sound. And if we find the atmosphere isn't conducive to the proclamation of the word, we should do what we can to get it in order. I call this aspect of preparation "contracting with the space."

Then we must be sure to contract with ourselves. We must remind ourselves that we have entered into this agreement with the Spirit, knowing that the ways of the Spirit aren't always predictable. This would suggest that we have a need of checking in with the Spirit even before we get started. Are we willing to be fully available to the power of the Spirit in this moment of communication? What if it involves more than verbal expression? Are we willing to lend a hand, a foot? If our low tones are needed, and perhaps our high tones. . . will we yield ourselves? We need to yield our total beings. What if a smile is needed? "You've got it." What about a frown or a nod? "You've got it."

Finally, we must not forget to contract with the people because the event can't take place through the preacher alone. The moment of anointed preaching is a *corporate reality*. So we should elicit from waiting congregations a willingness to respond to the Spirit. How incongruous it is to have a spirited message where only the preacher has contracted. The congregation also has to enter the contract. We must all say, "Lord, yes. Yes to the impulse of your Spirit. Yes to the guidance in our souls." We must accept the implications for our lives and not fear the visitation of the Lord, trusting God's word that if we be led by the Spirit, everything will be done in order. So, we preachers and our congregations need to be committed and contracted together.

As we grow, we are able to move beyond hindrances to ministry, too, such as preconceived notions about who God would choose to use. We need not be intimidated by the uniqueness of someone else's experience, be they male or female. While we have come a measurable distance, the church still has far to go in this regard. A full appreciation of individuals' various gifts would help us to more fully appropriate the anointing.

For example, I have noticed that women bring from their experience a special knowledge about how to prepare and how to deliver. I was impressed that the texts in Advent kept talking about Mary (Luke 1:57 and Luke 2:7) "bringing forth" and Elizabeth "bringing forth." And as I reflected on their conversation, I was challenged by the observation that they brought to completion that which had been started in them. I recalled the many things I had started, but had not yet "brought forth."

Mary said that which she brought forth was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And of course Elizabeth, who was advanced in age, acknowledged that in her case the Spirit also was to be

credited. Both realized that what was at work in them was made possible by the Holy Spirit.

Not only were these two special births made possible by the Spirit, but the Spirit, which conceived, also hovered through the process of gestation. Mary and Elizabeth knew the Spirit was with them, for when Mary went to greet Elizabeth, the Spirit overshadowed both of them and the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb. Just as it happened for Mary and Elizabeth, the Spirit is with us during various stages of development.

And so it is with sermon development. The Spirit is with us during conception, gestation, and even during the moment of delivery.

This revelation helped me to understand what preaching under the anointing is like. We must be able to deliver. This requires for us to be willing and to be strong in both mind and body to be able to handle this most sacred responsibility.

Then we have to have the capacity to wait a while. Sometimes, the sermon won't come when we want it to come. We have to learn to wait on the Lord.

We even have to learn to endure pain. In fact, the sign of pain is a good one. Those who avoid pain and struggle will not bring forth life in the pulpit. Indeed, the pain is likely to intensify just before a breakthrough can occur.

Preachers must master techniques of their art. We must learn to bring forth ... shallow breathing and deep breathing. We must know when to push and when to relax. Then we must know when to turn loose, let it go and trust that the life-giving Spirit, who stands with us through all of this, can complete the "bringing forth." We don't have to do our preaching alone. In fact, we cannot do it alone.

If only we preachers would allow ourselves to experience more of the anointing. If the churches across the nation and around the world would allow this to happen, the anointing would bring about transformation in our time.