

The Telos of Preaching

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ABSTRACT

Dissatisfaction is expressed by some within the church through a growing restlessness for more meaningful engagement on the journey of faith. This article suggests that preaching can assist in addressing this need. Anecdotally the purpose or *telos* of preaching has been narrowed by a focus on the immediate. However, this smaller vision is insufficient to scratch where people are truly itching. When preaching taps into the *telos* of humankind and the ultimate purposes of God, there is an expansive vision expressed for preaching. The language of invitation to participate as image bearers of our Creator in his creation, and to speak of the heart affections of the listener, gives the sermon relevance in addressing, shaping and nurturing the hungering and thirsting of the dissatisfied. An appeal is made to resist the drift into lesser purposes for preaching to encourage our people on journey of faith that can be both restless and satisfying.

Introduction

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirst for God, for the living God. (Ps., 42:1-2a NRSV)

Such hungering and thirsting is a recognition of the deep-seated identity crisis that we have as humans. Circumstances may push us into places where we have no other place to turn, and this becomes our universal cry. We desperately seek a relationship with our Creator-God, our Heavenly Father, even if we don't understand that to be the ultimate reason for our restlessness. Of course, whenever we hear these desperate cries, we are reminded of Jesus' words, "blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matt., 5:6 NRSV)

The hunger and thirst for righteousness of which Jesus speaks is "the dire need of a right relationship with God and others." It is famishing and thirsting for the righteousness that God makes possible for us through Christ. ¹

Nicodemus' search and questions to Jesus (John, 3:1-17) betray this same hungering even though he thought the solution to his restlessness lay in accessing the power that Jesus appeared to have.

¹ William Greathouse. *Wholeness In Christ: Toward a biblical theology of holiness*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1998 p176.

This hungering and thirsting is not only expressed by those ultimately searching for a relationship with Jesus, but also from those who, having found a relationship with Jesus, look for a deeper connection with God and within the community of faith. This “hungering” may be considered a “heart disposition” of the growing Christian which can be off-putting. Recently I have been working with four young couples who are all church goers and who meet every two weeks over a meal for prayer, faith conversations and doing life. They say that they do not engage in this way through traditional church forms. It is evident that these families seek more than they experience within the faith communities of which they are a part on a Sunday.

This has prompted questions for me. What does the community of authentic Christian faith look like in our contexts today? What are we destined for as disciples of Christ? Why are these young couples feeling so alienated from their communities of faith? Alan Hirsch says that the church as we know it, at its best, will only reach about 40% of the population. The other 60% will need to be reached by other than traditional church means.² This has led him to involvement in the “emergent church movement” to help overcome what he calls a “strategic problem” for the church. An expression of these concerns is the attempt to deconstruct institutionalism while maintaining a vital Christian faith. Wayne Jacobsen is typical of this restlessness and sentiment. In his book, “Finding Church,” Jacobsen gives an indication of an alternate view of the focus of a faith community that seeks to address this restlessness: “devotion without obligation; gathering without meetings; authority without hierarchy; order without control; unity without conformity; equipping without subduing.”³

My purpose is not to discuss the various approaches to ecclesiology and missiology, as interesting as these avenues might be. Rather I address the place of preaching in addressing this hungering and thirsting. Can our preaching “scratch where it itches”? Can our preaching assist in the search and point to a reality that is ultimately satisfying?

This paper briefly examines the vision or *telos* to which our preaching is ultimately directed. The *telos* of preaching gives direction to our hungering and searching. Good and sincere people often express a need for a more satisfying Christian journey. While in some cases it may be evidence of an all-pervasive consumerism, I suspect that at the very core of much of this restlessness is a dissatisfaction with what is offered as the direction and purpose for our lives. Is it possible that our preaching can open wider horizons from that which has been commonly accepted? Can our preaching positively contribute to the effectiveness of such searching and hungering? Can our preaching point to, and move people, to a surprisingly optimistic, grace-filled future? Can our preaching draw our people into that future? The terms “drawing” and “new horizons” move away from a sense of compulsion or driven-ness which can often have over-bearing tones or an abstracted moralism.

² Alan Hirsch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFR1XIHsids> accessed March 28, 2017.

³ Wayne Jacobsen, *Finding Church: what if there really is something more?* Newbury Park, CA: Trailview Media, 2014.

The Greek word *telos* is used 150 times in the LXX and 112 times in the NT. It appears relatively frequently in the Gospels and in the Apostle Paul's writings and has come to mean the end result and ultimate fate.⁴ Greathouse suggests that *telos* is *the reason for being, mature, fulfilling the purpose for which it is created.*⁵ It is with this emphasis that I explore the *telos* of preaching.

An obvious question is, "What are we hungering for?" A recognition of this hungering and thirsting can shape our preaching. It may well be that some preaching has contributed to the dissatisfying hungering and thirsting, if it paints (perhaps unwittingly) a vision of relationship with Christ and our journey of faith that is less than adequate for life. It is possible to have too small a vision.

A vision too small

There are at least four aspects within our approach and context for sermon preparation that can, if we are not careful, result in a lesser vision for the sermon. This minimised vision can breed a dis-satisfaction with preaching and perhaps give occasion for a growing number of people looking for Christianity outside of the walls of traditional church.

Firstly, Haddon Robinson's "big idea" approach to sermon making has been influential in many church circles. Beginning preachers work through a simple and often effective process to sharpen their idea and what they are about to say about that idea. Robinson says, "preachers communicate ideas ... the idea of the biblical passage should govern the idea of the sermon, ... and the idea must be applied."⁶ This is good as far as it goes, but there is so much more to preaching. Robinson, himself acknowledges this,⁷ but the pressure is on budding homilecticians to sharpen the main idea to build a coherent sermon. Somewhere the grandeur gets lost in the practical details; the Gospel becomes an idea, and the content of the Gospel becomes a set of propositions to be understood. Wilson (with the help of Rose) labels much of this approach as "traditional" preaching.⁸

Yang argues for the "recovery of the 'who' and 'why' of preaching in homiletical training, or more specifically, for the implementation of a "numen-participatory, holistic-aesthetic pedagogy of preaching in the classroom."⁹ While the focus remains on the how-to we lose sight of the identity of the preacher on this amazing journey with Christ the why we preach

⁴ Colin Brown (ed.) *Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol 2.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971, p61

⁵ William Greathouse. *Wholeness in Christ: toward a Biblical theology of holiness.* Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1998 p203.

⁶ Haddon Robinson, "My Theory of Homiletics" in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*" Haddon Robinson & Craig Brian Larson (eds.). Grand Rapids, MI" Zondervan, 2005, p 58

⁷ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching 2nd Edition.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001, p 19f

⁸ Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory.* St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004, p 146.

⁹ Sunggu Yang, "Homiletical aesthetics: a paradigmatic proposal for a holistic experience of preaching." *Theology Today*, 2017, Vol 73 (4) p 365.

can be lost.¹⁰ Attention to the *telos* of preaching is required to prevent the preparation of preachers (and presumably the sermon) being understood simply in mechanistic terms. Such a view can limit the horizons of the “hungering and thirsting.”

Secondly, pastoral pragmatism, a phrase borrowed from Pasquarello,¹¹ describes what he sees as an unintended consequence of the effectiveness of the ministry of the great revivalist, Charles Finney. A shift in the centre of Christian virtue from love of God enabled by the gift of divine grace (as understood by Wesley and Edwards) to human obedience to God’s law and the freedom of the will, has narrowed the horizons. The market place of felt needs and desire redefine the horizons of spiritual possibility.¹²

Pasquarello criticises Rick Warren’s “The Purpose Driven Life”¹³ approach for the same reasons. Well-meaning Christians are caught up into “individualistic and idiosyncratically defined ways of thinking and speaking of God, the church, the self, and the world.”¹⁴ We see a similar emphasis in Warren’s “Preaching for Change.”¹⁵ He states that expository preaching is a message that is centred around explaining and applying the Bible for life change and “life” appears to be that of the individual and their felt needs. There is ample literature that analyses the content of songs and liturgy to illustrate a dominant focus on self and our own experiences, rather than on worship and attentiveness to God and his community.¹⁶

Thirdly, a loss of vital memory of the grand story of God “has contributed to a pervasive sense of ‘homelessness’ among Christian people, who continue the struggle to maintain an ‘alternative vision,’ identity, and vocation in an increasingly indifferent and even hostile world.”¹⁷ Sermons over time that do not embrace the whole bible and the diversity in that grand story, lead to a parsimonious vision of what God is doing in his world. Michael Quicke describes this as “myopic preaching”. Faulty definitions of worship, a disregard for how God has led in the past, and wholesale mimicking of contemporary practices that appear, in the short term, to engage people, inadequately portray the vision of what we are called to be by God.¹⁸

In his adaptation of Torrance’s “Existential Experience Model”, Quicke describes a shift similar to the pastoral pragmatism described by Pasquarello.

¹⁰ Yang, p 369.

¹¹ Michael Pasquarello III. *Christian Preaching: a Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006 p 121.

¹² Pasquarello, p 23

¹³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: what on earth am I here for?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.

¹⁴ Warren, p 27

¹⁵ Rick Warren “Preaching for Life Change” DVD Set, Purpose Drive Publishing, 2004.

¹⁶ See the following as a few examples: Anne Morris, “Music in Worship: The Dark Side” *Practical Theology* (2010) 203-217; Patrick Malloy, “Rick Warren Meets Gregory Dix: the liturgical movement comes knocking at the megachurch door” *Anglican Theological Review* 92:3. Sam Burrows “Put Your Hands in the Air Like You Just Got Prayer” www.pressserviceinternational.org/sam-burrows.html 2014.

¹⁷ Pasquarello, p69

¹⁸ Pasquarello, p48

Here God's grace is understood primarily as a transaction between God and me. God is encountered in a personal crisis of decision because of Jesus Christ's work on the cross. ... Yet by stressing what Jesus did on the cross, preachers can so emphasise his work that they minimise his person, making us more interested in our experience of blessing than in Jesus Christ himself. Human response can therefore be reduced to, "Thank you, Lord, for saving me." Even worse, Jesus may be regarded as the way in to a relationship with God rather than the person through whom we continually draw near to God our father in the communion of the Spirit.¹⁹

It is too easy to get caught up in the narcissism of the world with its commensurate loss of vision of God's activity within his world. When our problems become the focus and a better life for us captures our attention, our preaching cannot guide or inspire effective hungering or thirsting after God. We ultimately cater for a lesser vision due to this subtle but profound theological shift.

A further challenge: polyvalence

These lesser visions in sermon preparation and delivery can reinforce different filters through which congregational members "hear" the sermon. The variety of meanings that result from these many different filters can leave the congregation distracted and even confused. Powell²⁰ explores polyvalence through the lens of the meaning of meaning. When we understand meaning to refer to the message of a specific text, then meaning is defined by the author. However, Powell speaks of "meaning as effect."²¹ From this perspective, polyvalence is expected, as for example, in responses to a movie. Regardless of the intent of the author people will often come away with their own understanding of a movie, or dare I say, the sermon. Powell asks,

Are sermons more like Bible commentaries or popular movies? Is the meaning of a sermon to be found in the message that it conveys – or in the effect that it has on its audience? And is the meaning of a sermon ultimately defined by its sender (the preacher) or by its recipients (the congregation)?²²

If the answer to Powell's question is that a sermon is more like a movie than a Bible commentary, then polyvalence is a reality within which the preacher must work.

This polyvalence is often the result of an interpretative "glass ceiling". Muehlhoff and Lewis, say that highly predictable communication inevitably leads to the reinforcing of current filters.²³ Congregational members then make assumptions on what they hear, and it is not altogether new information or insight. Jesus on the other hand was low on predictability (e.g. he befriended sinners against the social expectations of a rabbi and his parables were highly

¹⁹ Michael Quicke, *Preaching as Worship: an integrative approach to formation in your church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011 p45, 46

²⁰ Mark Allan Powell, *What Do They Hear? Bridging the gap between pulpit and pew*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.

²¹ Powell, Location 1086

²² Powell, Location 1998

²³ Tim Muehlhoff & Todd V Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian speech engaging culture*. Downers, Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

unpredictable) and with this unexpectedness he was able to break through his hearer's interpretive "glass ceilings". Hearer's assumptions had been undermined.²⁴ Expanding the horizons and *telos* of preaching may need to break "glass-ceilings" of hearer expectations to be truly heard.

For example, Eugene Peterson, speaks of three predominant ways we often seek to find transcendence and meaning: "through the ecstasy of alcohol and drugs, through the ecstasy of recreational sex, through the ecstasy of crowds."²⁵ These become the "filters" or the "glass ceilings" that shape interpretive expectations. The preacher seeks to provide an alternative view which strikes at the heart of an individualistic and consumeristic worldview. To quote Tom Wright,

Money, sex, and power... like fire, these "forces" are good servants but bad masters. ...They stop being demons when they stop being gods.²⁶

Here is the challenge for the preacher. We can be taken captive by a lesser vision than the one that is ultimately painted for us in Scripture. To get lost in the mechanics of ideas, fall into a pastoral pragmatism, lose a vital memory of the grand story of God's activity in His world, fall into a self-centred individualism, or create for ourselves a narrowing horizon of Christian development, is to be less than our calling. To be held in this truncated and stymied view of life, whether it be termed Christian or not, is to fail to see the full horizons that God has provided for us in Christ. It is to this greater horizon that we now turn our attention.

A Grand Vision

There is no better way to begin our exploration than with Jesus himself. His earthly ministry commenced with announcing the Kingdom (Matt 4:23) which he then described in counter intuitive terms in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5 -7). The prelude to Christ's ministry and the experience that set his life priorities was his experience of temptation in the wilderness (Matt., 4:1-11). To be tempted to use the power that he possessed to care for himself, enjoy comfort, or to dominate kingdoms, was to counter his mission as God's Son.

(H)e signals that he is a Messiah of a different kind of Kingdom. He trades dominating power for the authority to establish a Kingdom that will not be built upon the backs of the oppressed, rejected, enslaved, and accused. Instead, this Kingdom will be built upon the vulnerable and dangerous love of God. The love that is neither controlling, nor manipulative, neither destructive, nor violent. God's Kingdom will not be built upon conventional wisdom or grand narratives of conquering warriors, but upon stories of contrast: all-consuming power revealed through self-denying love.²⁷

²⁴ Muehlhoff & Lewis, p85, 86.

²⁵ Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: a memoir*. Colorado Springs, CO: HarperOne, 2011, p157

²⁶ Tom Wright, *The Day The Revolution Began: rethinking the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2016, p101.

²⁷ Aimee Niles, "Matt 4:1-11" in www.aplainaccount.org/lent-1a-gospel Ben Cremer & Danny Quanstrom, accessed March 20, 2017

This breaks through commonly held expectations and the “filters” that were traditionally in place. Scandalous as the Incarnation is, there is a subversive humility to the actions of Jesus that challenges the *status quo*. The Kingdom of God is near, but it is a Kingdom like no other. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt., 5 – 7), and particularly the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-11), give a picture of this very different kingdom to which we have been called. Surprising attitudes are affirmed that appear so counter intuitive. For example, paucity of spirit is celebrated as a dependency on God rather than on self; the value of a broken heart is strengthened as hope is found in God in the midst of despair; meekness is embraced as a teachable spirit; mercy is exalted as a generous and hospitable engagement with others; purity is welcomed as a transparent, selfless motivation for service; peacemaking stands in the place of polarisation and fractured relationships to provide space for grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness. The Kingdom of God is proclaimed with an authority and strength that belies the image of “Jesus, meek and mild”.

It is passion that transcends personal interests and the horizons of one’s own life. **It is humility animated and directed by purpose and telos.** ... It is all of a piece with passionate humility to be impatient for justice, relentless in the quest for truth, hardworking for peace or devoted to the care of others. **Such passionate humility is both earthed and restless.** ²⁸

Indeed, this is a vision of the Kingdom NOT after our own expectations!

Secondly, James Smith argues for an expansive vision that counters Quicke’s lament of myopic preaching. His vision has more to do with the ultimate purposes of humankind which, in turn, has implications for preaching.

The Biblical doctrine of creation is not just about where we came from; it’s about where we are. It’s not just about who we are, but whose we are. It is not just a statement about our past; **it is a calling to the future.**²⁹

Capturing this calling is a key task of preaching. Smith puts this within the story of God as it is immersed in the context of worship – intentional, historic, liturgical.³⁰ This worship reflects on the past and all that God has done, but just as importantly invites us into a new and deeper existence of relationship with God in Christ through His Spirit.

This deeper relationship is not just of a means of reaching heaven, but rather engaging our God created vocation to be stewards of creation as his image bearers. This vocation is to reflect the praises of all creation back to God Himself. The tragic consequence of sin is that we have distorted our vocation to give worship and allegiance to forces and powers within

²⁸ Stephen Cherry “Discipleship and Christian Character” *Theology* 2016, Vol. 19 (3) 193-199 p198. (Emphasis mine)

²⁹ James K A Smith *You Are What You Love: the spiritual power of habit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.

³⁰ Smith, p170 Emphasis mine.

creation itself.³¹ God gives us a new vision of a new heaven and a new earth - not merely a focus on individual salvation, a person's felt needs, or a "personal ticket" to heaven. Wright argues that when we take this greater view of human vocation it frees us from the rather limiting Platonised eschatology, a moralised anthropology and a paganised soteriology.³²

Once this grander vision is embraced, we perceive more of what God is doing in his world. God's grand story of redemption tells of fragile, often damaged people, called of God into a future that God is actively bringing into being. There is an open-endedness and a freshness that blossoms with positive possibilities and grace-filled opportunities - even in the midst of the desolate, confusing, and suffering.³³ The Kingdom of God is understood as both present and future reality. New horizons far beyond our own parochial circumstances are opened as we experience hospitable community in shared vocation.

A third aspect of this grander vision is the way in which it is communicated. The Apostle Peter says,

... always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. (I Peter 3:15 NRSV)

Due to the counter intuitive nature of this message of the Kingdom, it is easy to focus on the first part of this verse and adopt an adversarial stance. Hearing outrageous opinions (usually misinformed) that malign Christianity can tempt us to take a defensive posture that is delivered with force and gusto. The result can be to talk past our opponents rather than with them and thus solidify the polarisation. Muehlhoff and Lewis speak of communication spirals where one person's negative engagement mirrors the other and eventually feed off each other in a downward spiral of mis-communication. In harmony with a broader vision, the Apostle Peter speaks of giving this defence "with gentleness and reverence". (I Peter 3:15b NRSV)

To check a degenerative spiral, you must "alter your response – do what comes unnaturally".³⁴

Boone recognises that the focus is not on removing disagreements or tensions necessarily, but rather to return respect and acknowledgement of our common humanity into these conversations.³⁵ This counter-intuitive response picks up on the relational component in communication that seeks not only to reflect this very different Kingdom of which we are a

³¹ Tom Wright. *The Day the Revolution Began: rethinking the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2016 p103.

³² Wright, p 76,77

³³ Dan Boone *Preaching the Story that Shapes Us* Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2008 p18, 27.

³⁴ Muehlhoff and Lewis p191

³⁵ Boone, Dan. *A Charitable Discourse: talking about things that divide us*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2010 p30.

part, but also to interrupt the negative spiral that tends to be the default setting in moments of conflict and difference.

To summarise, elements of this grander vision involve proclaiming a Kingdom that draws us as a community of faith into God's future. It empowers a counter-intuitive way of living and communicating. This vision takes us beyond ourselves as a collection of individuals, and places us in the very centre of what God is doing in His world i.e. stewarding the recreation of a new heaven and a new earth. This is communicated in "abnormal ways" as a witness to the counter-intuitive nature of God's kingdom. Perhaps the "abnormal ways" of communicating are simply an essence of the Kingdom of God.

Implications for preaching

With these brief thoughts I return my original question: can our preaching "scratch where it itches" and assist in the quest for righteousness and point to a reality that is ultimately satisfying?

Firstly, Yang's appeal for "homiletical aesthetics"³⁶, that goes to the "who" as well as to the "why" of preaching, is reflected in this grander vision of vocation as God's calling. As we are caught up in the *telos* of humankind, we are shaped by its possibilities. The tension of an "earthed" but "restless" humility³⁷ draws us into a deeply relational communion through our love of God. Smith says,

Love as our most fundamental orientation to the world is less a conscious choice and more like a baseline inclination, a default orientation that generates the choices we make. ... Christian worship ... is essentially a COUNTERformation to those rival liturgies we are often immersed in, cultural practices that covertly capture our loves and longings, miscalibrating them, orienting us to rival versions of the good life. ... We can't recalibrate the heart from the top down, through mere informational measures. The orientation of the heart happens from the bottom up, through the formation of our habits of desire.³⁸

Our foremost task as preachers is the rehabilitation of our hearts and the hearts of our people toward God. Preaching focused upon this recalibration is faithful to the grander vision.

Preaching is to be conducted in the context of worship. To have a vision too small is to limit that "rehabilitation" of the heart.

Secondly, the language of invitation to God's intended future is a primary thrust of our proclamation. This by no means gives us a monochrome approach to preaching, for community development in this present / future reality is influenced by our context. We are not context bound, but rather context sensitive. The language of ought and a sense of drivenness, with its emphasis on human achievement, is exchanged for responsiveness to God's

³⁶ Yang, 2017

³⁷ Cherry, 2016

³⁸ Smith, p 16-25 (emphases mine)

grace, moment by moment. The terms “drawing” and “new horizons” move us away from a sense of compulsion which can often have over-bearing tones or an abstracted moralism. We are invited into His story and gathering in corporate worship locates us in an awareness of the presence of God and His story. This implies the need for a response from us.³⁹ Preaching is not just the delivering of information or good news. There is an implicit, “So what are you going to do about this?” While a sense of ought can also require a response, the language of invitation does so by drawing us rather than pushing us.

Thirdly, if the recalibration of the heart is to be a key focus, then our preaching to the affections is an important aspect. Moody and Weekes define the affections as “the movement of our thoughts, feeling and will towards a desired object, person or event. An affection is what inclines us TO something. Affections are what move us toward action.”⁴⁰

The challenge for preaching is to break the “glass ceilings” of expectation, challenge our loves, and offer wider horizons that become possible by the grace of God. A tendency is to focus on that which may not be bad but a narrowing of vision due to self-interest. Such things as family, career, ministry are worthy foci, but cannot be regarded as ultimate if we are to capture the full purposes of God.⁴¹

Good Biblical preaching then will always probe the workings of the heart. In doing so, it will expose deep-rooted idols and exalt the Lord Jesus. In aiming for the heart, we must remember that the strategy of preaching is not just to move the emotions or the will of the listener, but to illuminate and fire the imagination with the truth of the Gospel. We must remember that words, including sermons, DO things- and not just on an emotional level. They educate, warn and encourage – not just make me feel happy or sad.⁴²

Before we hear this as simply individualistic, remember the calling to being citizens of the counter intuitive Kingdom of God. Preaching is embedded in the corporate worship experience that seeks to restore our loves. The *telos for Christians is Christ: Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of what we’re made for, of the end to which we are called.*⁴³ Sounds too simple, doesn’t it? Our preaching, our worship, our gathering becomes an opportunity to hear God’s invitation in Christ, through His Spirit, to be in communion with Him. Day after day, week after week, disciplines that speak to our imagination can teach us to love in ways we did not think possible.

As sermons are prepared, the following check list may be useful guide to how well a biblical *telos* to the sermon is expressed.

³⁹ Boone p 201

⁴⁰ Josh Moody & Robin Weekes *Burning Hearts: preaching to the affections*. Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2004. Oxford eBooks Ltd., 2014. Loc 130.

⁴¹ Moody & Weekes, Loc 739

⁴² Moody & Weekes, Loc 740.

⁴³ James Smith p90.

1. Does the sermon include affective elements of living? Does the sermon move beyond engaging the cognitive to include addressing the affections of the heart? Is this more than a lecture and content delivery?
2. Is there a sense of optimism and curiosity expressed that moves away from a desperate driven-ness sourced in individual need to exploration and discovery in relationship with Christ? Does the sermon bring hope and affirmation into an individual's and congregation's journey of faith?
3. Is there a gracious invitation to delve into (or deepen) a relationship with Christ that shapes identity as a citizen of the Kingdom of God? Has the language of "ought" (driven-ness) been replaced with an invitation (drawing) to come?
4. Is there a creative challenging of the *status quo* or preconceived ideas that can reveal the counter-intuitive nature of living as people in the Kingdom of God?
5. Does the sermon reveal community (or corporate) life and the stewarding of that life rather than a privileging of the individual as the centre of all?
6. Is there an openness and anticipation that God will work in fresh and perhaps unpredictable ways? Is there a hungering and thirsting after God expressed? Is there opportunity for response?

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to show that there is a *telos* to humankind to which preaching can speak directly. This becomes the *telos* of preaching. Hungering and thirsting that is sometimes expressed as a dissatisfaction with church life is to be guided, shaped and perhaps nurtured through preaching with an expansive *telos*. This *telos* does not leave people wandering in ever diminishing circles. Responding to God's call to be his image bearers moves our engagement with God and with each other from the realms of our needs and our perspective, to a deepening relationship with God in Christ. Our preaching becomes a clarion call to engagement with God and his world. The restlessness is focussed on rehabilitating our loves to be dwellers in a new kingdom that transforms this world. Here is an apparent source of the dissatisfaction for the four couples with whom I meet fortnightly. The restlessness can become a passion to address injustice, selfishness, and fractured relationships. We can find a life transforming dependency on God, hope in the midst of despair, a transparent selflessness, and a generous hospitality that is counter-intuitive. Actually, it is a new creation in a new world. The invitation to this life is initiated by a loving God, expressed in Christ and encountered through His Spirit. Let's not settle for a lesser vision.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.
(Matt., 5:6 NRSV)

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