

ILLUSTRATING THE SERMON

A Lecture by Dr. R. Timothy Jones

Preaching to a postmodern audience is growing more and more difficult. In many respects, preaching today is stoic (without illustrations sermons can become emotionally indifferent), sterile and static. Every sermon should be dynamic (active and true to its homiletical intent). Something should be born out of the sermon – passion, conviction, repentance, action, growth, etc.

A recent radio marketing campaign used the slogan “I saw it on the radio.” This expression captures the sentiment of what it means to illustrate the point of the sermon. The illustration is often a bridge between the hermeneutical and the homiletical. The value of sermon illustrations is that “pictures are painted.”

1. Websites, our oral tradition, and books of sermon illustrations are not good sources of illustrations.

Every preacher has those books and visits those websites!

2. It is critical to verify information before using it.

[Millennials fact-check your illustrations - While you are preaching!]

3. An illustration should never overpower the text of the point of the message.

[The illustration is not the message in and of itself. The people should not remember the illustration at the expense of remembering the text or the point of the sermon.]

4. Illustrations by nature are metaphorical; thus, clichés should be limited.

5. Using the same style and types of illustrations is as detrimental as using the same illustrations.

[The preacher becomes predictable and monochromatic.]

☐ Sources and Types of Illustrations

1. Scripture & Bible stories (particularly with Psalms)
2. Hymns/songs (and their stories)
3. Negro spirituals
4. Preview
5. Anecdote
6. Personification
7. Literature
8. Short stories
9. Prose or poetry
10. Quotes
11. Synopsis of the text (Think like Twitter – 140 characters)

12. Humor/joke
13. Biography
14. Current event
15. Historical event
16. Word study or picture (Greek & Hebrew)
17. Ancient custom
18. Editorial
19. Nursery rhyme
20. World record
21. Scientific date or experiment
22. Statistics
23. Movie plot
24. Athletic (sports) event
25. Personal experience [Careful & limited especially referring to your family]
26. Fairy tales & fable
27. Folklore
28. Mythology
29. Research data
30. Survey
31. Hypothetical situation
32. A series of questions
33. Analogy
34. Examples/lists
35. Cultural distinctions
36. Differences in world religions
37. Clichés
38. Riddle
39. Demonstrations (symbols)
40. First person narrative
41. Old wives tales
42. Allegory
43. Parable
44. Mystery
45. Shock treatment
46. Challenge
47. Video clips
48. Actors and actresses
49. Review
50. Principle
51. Action steps
52. Formula
53. Resolution (vow)
54. Logic

Think About It!

The sermon or story has to be created before the portrait is painted. The audience will never see it before it is formed.