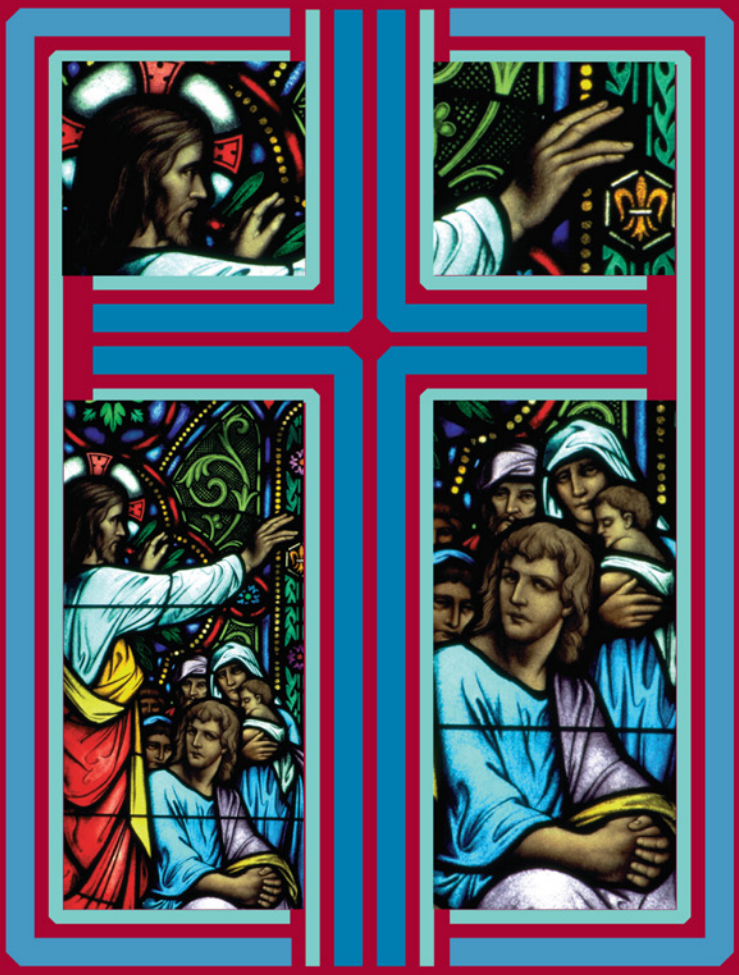
Patterns of Preaching



A Sermon Sampler

Ronald J. Allen

EDITOR

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To
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A People of the Gospel
Whose Vision of God
Is as the Land in Which You Live:
Loving, Gracious, Clear, Open, Awesome

Your Faith
Is in the Soul of
Linda McKiernan-Allen
Spouse
Mother of our Children
Deepest Partner in the Gospel

Whoever Leads Me to
Faith and Community That is More
Loving, Gracious, Clear, Open, Awesome

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

A tremendous new energy has captivated the field of preaching. Preachers are generating new patterns for sermons. Many preachers are rediscovering freshness in older ways of preaching. *Patterns for Preaching: A Sermon Sampler* aims to contribute to this energy by presenting 34 models of preaching—some new, some old.

This collection is distinctive in three ways. First, each sermon demonstrates a particular approach to preaching. This book exposes preachers to thirty-four different ways of conceiving sermons from both the contemporary and classical periods. Second, this book accompanies a textbook on preaching: Ronald J. Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel: An Introduction to Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998). Each book can be read independently, but when taken together, they form a broad interplay between theory and practice. Third, each sermon is annotated with comments about the congregation in which the sermon was preached and the purposes of the sermon. Readers thus can sense the sermon as part of a living conversation in community.

Several times in this book I refer to the gospel. With my colleague Clark M. Williamson, I take the gospel to be the news, revealed to the church through Jesus Christ, of God's unconditional love for each and every entity and of God's will for justice for each and every entity.[1] The gospel can be formulated differently, but all expressions of the gospel known to me include or imply the elements of unconditional love and call for justice.

The preacher helps the congregation interpret what God's unconditional love and will for justice offers each person and situation and what it requires of each person and situation. The sermon is critical reflection. The preacher helps the congregation name the world from the

[1] For this way of formulating the gospel, see Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *A Credible and Timely Word: Process Theology and Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1991), 71–90; idem., *The Teaching Minister* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 75–82; and especially Clark M. Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Theology and the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 18–16, 22–23.

standpoint of the gospel. The sermon can become an experience of divine love and a call to justice.

I also refer to sermons on biblical texts, doctrines, Christian practices, and other topics (e.g., personal and social issues). All these elements may be present in any sermon, but a sermon can also focus on a single one of them. Most preaching centers on encounter with a biblical text, doctrine, a Christian practice, or a topic of a personal or social nature. For fuller explanations of these categories, see the introductory remarks in chapter 22 (topical preaching), chapter 24 (preaching on a Christian doctrine), chapter 25 (preaching on a Christian practice), chapter 27 (preaching on a personal issue), and chapter 28 (preaching on a social issue).

We can understand sermons along two axes: (a) *content* and (b) patterns of *movement*. From the point of view of *content*, a sermon tends to be either *exposition* of a biblical text or interpretation of a *topic*.

In *expository* preaching, the purpose of the sermon is to help the congregation interpret its situation from the perspective of the gospel through the lens of a biblical passage or theme. The sermon centers in the exegesis, theological analysis, and hermeneutical appropriation of the biblical material.

In a *topical* sermon, the preacher helps the congregation interpret a topic from the perspective of the gospel. Topical sermons are typically sparked by a Christian doctrine, a Christian practice, a personal situation, or a social situation. The topical sermon may draw upon the Bible, as well as on materials from Christian history and theology, from the human and physical sciences. However, topical preaching does not center on the exposition of the Bible in the same way as the expository sermon.

With respect to *movement*, a sermon tends to be *deductive* or *inductive*. While philosophers use these terms in tight definitions to refer to specific forms of logic, preachers use the words more generally to describe patterns of movement.

In a *deductive* sermon, the preacher makes the major point of the sermon near the beginning of the sermon. The preacher then develops that point. The preacher can do so in any number of ways, e.g., by drawing out the implications, by considering its effects in different spheres of life (e.g., in the world, in the nation, in the state, in the community, in the church, in the home, in the individual life), by articulating reasons that the major point is compelling. Directness and clarity are major strengths of deductive preaching. A deductive approach is particularly useful when the congregation already agrees with the major point but needs to expand its implications. Such preaching is also helpful when the preacher needs to spell out in precision the reasons for a point of view. Deductive

sermons can help the preacher respond to a question or issue that is burning in the congregation's heart, and for which the community wants a straight response.

However, since the congregation knows the direction of the sermon from the very beginning, deductive sermons run the risk of being dull. They do not create suspense and tension that keep many congregations involved in inductive sermons. Deductivity may not serve occasions when the congregation is at odds with the point of view of the sermon. At the beginning of the sermon, the congregation may hear a viewpoint with which they disagree and simply stop listening.

In *inductive* preaching, the pastor does not come to the major point or conclusion until the latter part of the sermon. The message begins with questions or issues that need to be interpreted from the viewpoint of the gospel. The sermon then gathers and evaluates resources from the Bible, from Christian theology, and from other arenas that help the community understand the biblical text, situation, or issue that is the focal point of the sermon. The sermon is a journey of exploration and discovery. Inductive preaching creates tension: The congregation recognizes unresolved qualities in understanding a biblical text, doctrine, practice, or situation and seeks to know how those tensions can be resolved. Inductive preaching is itself an experience of discovery. The congregation joins in the preacher in exploring the text or topic and arriving at a conclusion. In this respect, inductive movement reflects the movement of many human experiences. Inductive preaching is especially useful when the congregation is bored by a text or topic. The inductive movement creates tension that helps the congregation want to be involved in the sermon. Inductive preaching can particularly serve occasions when the congregation is at odds with the viewpoint of the sermon or when the sermon needs to help the congregation change its perception of a text, topic, or situation. The preacher does not alienate the congregation by voicing at the beginning of the sermon a perspective with which the community disagrees. The sermon attempts to develop trust in which pastor and people think together about a vexing text, topic, or situation.

When we put these categories together, we can speak of four kinds of sermons:

- expository-deductive
- expository-inductive
- topical-deductive
- topical-inductive.

These patterns can be combined in a single sermon. A sermon may begin inductively and reach a conclusion that is then developed deductively. A sermon could begin with an exegesis of a biblical text, but conclude with a more general, topical, consideration of an idea or image that is suggested by the text.

Contemporary patterns tend to be inductive in character and to rely heavily on story and image. Classical patterns tend to be deductive and to be linear and propositional. However, all elements are found in some contemporary and classical forms.

One of the most permeating emphases in contemporary preaching is that a sermon ought to be contextual and never generic. The preacher needs (a) to interpret the situation of the congregation from the standpoint of the gospel, (b) find a form or genre of preaching that is congenial to the theological claim and orientation of the preacher and the community, and (c) that gives the sermon a good opportunity to fulfill its purpose.

In these respects, a major shift in emphasis is taking place in contemporary preaching. Whereas preachers formerly concentrated on what they wanted to *say*, preachers now emphasize how *listeners receive* the sermon. The preacher shapes the sermon in view of how listeners will likely process it. Of course, what the minister wants to say and how the congregation receives it are intimately related.

The emerging discipline of congregational studies teaches us that congregations are social worlds with their own patterns of receiving and processing communications. Studies of faith development reveal that within each congregation, listeners receive and process communications in different ways. The sermon needs to take into account the world of the congregation and the different ways in which members of the congregation take messages on board. While a minister may have a preferred style of preaching, a minister needs to be able to make use of multiple approaches to preaching in order to help a sermon have an optimum opportunity to be received positively by a given congregation on a given occasion. This book provides examples of leading approaches to sermon form that are in use today.

In this book I sometimes use the terms *Beginning* and *Ending* instead of the designations Introduction and Conclusion. *Beginning* refers to the beginning of the sermon, the purpose of which is to invite the congregation into the world of the sermon. The first part of today's sermon is seldom a formal introduction. A sermon usually arises from a conversation that is already taking place explicitly or implicitly in the congregation. The subject does not need to be introduced so much as identified

and focused. The beginning typically helps preacher and community engage one another in the sermonic phase of the community's conversation about the text, doctrine, practice, or situation.

Ending refers to the end of the sermon. The purpose of the ending is to encourage the congregation to continue reflecting on the sermon and its implication for the everyday world. The term conclusion suggests something that the preacher does not want to happen. The preacher does not typically want the congregation to think that the community's conversation regarding the direction of the sermon is concluded when the preacher stops talking. The preacher hopes that the mode of conversation shifts from the preacher talking and the congregation listening to the congregation reflecting among themselves. The preacher does stop talking, but the preacher hopes that part of the sermon will encourage continuing conversation.

The following types of sermons are represented in the book. The first part of the book, *Traditional Patterns*, contains historic models of sermon structure that can still help congregations encounter the gospel. The next division, *Contemporary Patterns,* contains approaches to preaching that have emerged in the last twenty years and that seem especially suitable to preaching today. Some of these patterns are quite well-known, others less so. The messages in *Patterns for Subjects* demonstrate how different subject matters and different foci can lead to particular approaches in the sermon. The final section, *Patterns for Theology*, illustrates how different theological methods (e.g., evangelical, liberation, postliberal, revisionary) result in sermons that are faithful to the gospel, but that are nuanced according to the theological proclivities of each method.

These four divisions of the book are somewhat arbitrary. The categories mix apples and oranges. The categories also overlap. For instance, a distinctive theological viewpoint can be expressed in any one of a number of patterns of movement from the traditional or the contemporary scene. A sermon on a social issue could body forth from evangelical theology or liberation theology. A teaching sermon can be inductive or deductive; it can be in the Puritan Plain Style, the simple inductive approach, or traveling from Oops to Yeah. The permutations are too numerous for each to be represented in any one volume.

The thirty-four kinds of sermons mentioned in this book are not exhaustive. We could identify many other approaches to preaching in the contemporary church. For example, Thomas H. Troeger mentions the following: creating a parable, assuming there is more to the biblical story, playing with an image, writing the sermon as a movie script, using flashbacks, reframing sacraments, letting children lead in the process of sermon

preparation, playing a game, listening to muffled voices, and comparing translations.[2] Eugene Lowry envisions distinct ways of developing narrative sermons: running the story, delaying the story, suspending the story, alternating the story.[3] However, the sermons in *Patterns of Preaching* represent leading movements in preaching today.

[2]Thomas H. Troeger, *Ten Strategies for Preaching in a Multi-Media Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

[3]Eugene L. Lowry, *How to Preach a Parable: Designs for Narrative Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

PART 1

Traditional Patterns

1

Puritan Plain Style

As the term "plain" implies, this approach to preaching is simple and to the point. The purpose of the style is to help the congregation encounter the gospel as directly as possible. The Plain Style has been (and is) used by preachers in several theological movements.

The elements of the sermon in the Plain Style are *Beginning, Exposition of the Biblical Text, Theological Analysis of the Text, Application of the Interpretation of the Text* to the situation of the congregation, *Ending*. This style can be adapted to sermons on Christian doctrines and practices and other topics. In the latter instances, the *Exposition of the Text* would be replaced by *Exposition of the Doctrine, Practice, or Topic*. The *Theological Analysis* would focus on the doctrine, practice, or topic.

The *Beginning* helps the congregation focus on the subject of the sermon. The preacher may include a short *Statement of the Direction of the Sermon*. This statement alerts the congregation to the claim of the sermon. In the *Exposition of the Biblical Text, Doctrine, Practice, or Topic*, the preacher gives a brief exegesis of the biblical passage, doctrine, practice, or other topic. When turning to *Theological Analysis*, the sermon reflects theologically on the theological claims of the text, doctrine, practice, or other topic from the perspective of the gospel. Is the witness of text appropriate to the gospel? intelligible? moral? What can the congregation believe about the subject of the sermon? When *Applying* the text, the preacher helps the community articulate the implications of the congregation's understanding of the text, doctrine, or practice for its everyday life. When

Ending, the preacher tries to help the congregation continue the conversation that started in the sermon.

Some sermons in this style do not contain a separate component for theological analysis. When a text, doctrine, or practice is appropriate to the gospel, intelligible, and morally plausible, the preacher sometimes moves directly from exegesis to application.

As Thomas G. Long's sermon below illustrates, this style need not be wooden or mechanical. It can have a dynamic quality. The preacher makes excellent use of imagery and story in the service of clarity of communication. The application, while direct and clear, leaves room for the imagination of the listeners to extend its implications into their own everyday worlds.

Listening to a sermon in the Puritan Plain Style, the congregation has every opportunity to get the preacher's point. This type of sermon is easy to prepare. While the preacher must consider what to say, the preacher doesn't have to wrestle with how to say it. The task of each part of the sermon is clearly defined. Further, this style helps the community consider forthrightly the implications of the gospel for their everyday world. Some preachers, however, find this approach unimaginative, tedious, and predictable (especially if the preachers uses it weekly). The Plain Style can violate some materials. Our perception of a poem, for instance, does not always conform to the linear flow of exposition-theological analysis-application.

THOMAS G. LONG, one of the most prolific and influential figures in contemporary preaching, is director of Geneva Press. His *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) and *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) are fulcrum works in contemporary preaching. He assembles useful collections of materials, e.g., with Edward Farley, *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture. In Honor of David Buttrick* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); with Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *A Chorus of Witnesses: Model Sermons for Today's Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); with Gail O'Day, *Listening to the Word: Essays in Honor of Fred B. Craddock* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); with Neely Dixon McCarter, *Preaching In and Out of Season* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). He has also written biblical commentaries on Matthew and Hebrews. He preaches and lectures in congregations and conferences throughout the United States and Canada.

THOMAS G. LONG

The Difference Between Brown and Green

Jeremiah 17:5–8

(Beginning) This passage of prophetic wisdom from the book of Jeremiah sharply contrasts the life of faith—a life that trusts the ways of God—with the life that most of us are tempted to lead, a life that relies on its own wits and places its bets on the ways of the world. To be a person of faith, says Jeremiah, is to be like a deep-rooted tree standing on the banks of a flowing river. To be otherwise is to be like a scrub plant, wilting in the fierce desert heat, fighting for its life in a parched and thirsty wasteland.

It is easy to admire the poetic images here—shrub versus tree, desert versus oasis, parched wilderness versus moist and fertile land. However, Jeremiah is not mainly interested in making poetry, but in making souls. This word from the prophet exercises its true power only if its poetry winnows its way into the deep places of our experience. To be grasped by this passage, we must do more than touch its surfaces with our fingers. We must feel the dry heat of the waterless places in our throats. To put it bluntly, we must know about drought, and quite honestly, about drought most of us know very little.

One summer a few years back, we went thirty-seven days without rain, and we called it a drought. My neighbors and I paced our front yards, pawing at the yellow spots, and raised our fists to the merciless heavens because we had lost a few boxwoods and patches of Zoysia. "We sure could use some rain," we would call to each other in the heat. "Yes, we could," the neighbor would call back. "My tomatoes are burned up." But then we would retreat to the air-conditioned cool of our houses and pour glasses of iced tea. About drought we know little.

A kid in line at the theater concession stand orders a tub of popcorn and a soda pop. "What size soda?" the clerk wants to know. "Gimme a giant size," the kid replies. "I'm *dying* of thirst." About drought we know little.

(Statement of the Direction of the Sermon) But about drought, Jeremiah knows much. And Jeremiah has much to teach us—about drought in the human heart.

(Exposition of the Biblical Text) In Palestine, drought is not merely a threat to backyard tomatoes and Zoysia lawns. It is a threat to all of life—human, animal, plant. When the harsh Judean sun turns its blazing wrath upon the land, fields are scored and cracked, cisterns become dry as sandpaper, towns grieve, farmers cover their heads in morning, the crops shrivel,

the doe abandons her fawn, and donkeys pant like dogs in the torrid and killing heat (Jeremiah 14:2–6). About drought Jeremiah knows much.

Jeremiah knew not only about the drought that affects the land, but also about the drought that afflicts the human spirit. "The sin of Judah," he warned, "is written with an iron pen," and that sin was idolatry. "Idolatry" sounds, of course, like an entry in a Bible encyclopedia, a remote description of strange and ancient practices, of Baal and Ashera, of fertility cults, and gods of stone and wood. But the idolatry of Judah sprung from a source very familiar to us—the human thirst for life, full and joyful. The fertility religions of the ancient world, so seductive to the Jewish people, were about the richness of life, the abundance of the land, the human desire not to miss a single pleasure, to celebrate life, to eat the sweet fruit of existence, and to allow the succulent juices to flow freely down one's face.

The advertising copy over the photo of a sexy-looking luxury sports car reads:

"You've made a statement. Here's the exclamation point.
This is exhilaration, period"

That's what we all want for our lives, of course—something to break the tedium, an exclamation point, exhilaration, excitement, the wind in our face. And wanting to lift high the cup of life and drink it down to the bottom is not wrong in and of itself. The arts, the dance, the game, laughter, the feast, the tender touch—all of these are expressions of the human thirst for life, abundant. Indeed, such a life is a gift from God.

But how do we become fully alive? To this question Jeremiah speaks a hard word: The human heart, left to its own devices, chooses the wrong path. What seems to us to be the place to be, what seems to us to be a lush field of joy, what seems to us to be the obvious way to wring every satisfaction from life is, in fact, a mirage. And what seems to us to be a perilous, costly, even foolish way of life—the life of sacrificial faith—is, in truth, the fertile and joyful oasis we weary travelers are seeking.

(Theological Analysis) Many years ago, a biblical scholar, Johannes Pedersen, wrote a book on the geography of Palestine. He was struck by the fact that three of the major world religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all spring from this same small patch of unpromising land. Pedersen wondered if this were true partly because the inhabitants of that land know the difference between brown and green, between the killing desert and the life-giving oasis, between the scorching wind that burns the skin and the cool oil that heals. Brown and green…death and life…trusting in ourselves and trusting in God. Jeremiah wants us to know the difference.

An old joke tells of a rabbi on his deathbed who called to his side his oldest son. "Itzak," the dying man whispered, "I want to tell you the secret of life." Itzak placed his ear next to his father's trembling lips, the better to hear his parting wisdom. "Itzak," said the old man urgently, "an angel appeared to me in a dream last night and showed me two bridges to the place of glory. One bridge is built of human cunning. It is wide and strong and made of iron and stone. The second bridge is built of Torah, the instruction of God. It is narrow, seemingly frail, dangerous to cross, and made of the woven strands of Moses' beard. Itzak, my son, take my advice. Travel over the first bridge."

And we do, of course. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." But we hunger and thirst for a comfortable lifestyle. "Blessed are the peacemakers," says Jesus, but we are ready to punish anyone who challenges our national pride. "Blessed are the merciful," Jesus teaches, but if we don't look out for ourselves we will get taken advantage of at the office. We know the way of God, but we choose the bridge of human cunning.

Ironically, the gospel violates common sense. What looks to the human eye like life, Jeremiah tells us, is really a killing desert. What looks like a wilderness, the way of faith, trusting in the promises of God, is really a verdant field of joy.

In 1931, the Midwest experienced a bumper crop of wheat. Cash flowed freely, and times were good. Farmers bought land and machinery. Only a fool would not place trust in the unending richness of the land. "A sort of madness pervaded the atmosphere," one of those farmers wrote years later, "and I fell for it like ever." The next year there was little rain; indeed, the rains failed to come year after year, and the seemingly fertile fields became parched and withered, the famous Dust Bowl of the 1930s. "The summer of '36 was one of the hottest ever," said Oklahoma farmer Lawrence Svobida. "Hundreds of square miles of bare fields absorbed the sun's rays like fire brick in a kiln. The wind was like a blast from a huge, red-hot furnace, causing my face to blister and peel off.... I found myself hardening to disaster. Words are useless to describe the experience when the thin thread of faith snaps. My youth and ambition were ground into the very dust itself."[1]

(Application) Jeremiah would have known well how the youth and ambition of a people could be ground into dust. "Those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away

[1]Lawrence Svobida, as quoted on the public television program, *Surviving the Dust Bowl*. Produced and written by Cana Gazit, WGBH Educational Foundation, 1998.

from the Lord…shall be like a shrub in the desert." But Jeremiah also knew of another way. "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord…. They shall be like a tree planted by water…. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green in the year of drought." The difference between brown and green.

There is a person named Wayne who lives in an urban homeless shelter. Wayne has a psychological disorder severe enough to prevent him from keeping a job, but not severe enough to allow him to receive disability payments. So, Wayne is condemned to wander the wasteland of the city streets. But Wayne has also found a green place, an oasis. Wayne has joined a church, and he is present for every service, every meal, every event. "When I go outside this church, I'm a homeless guy, a bum, a transient," Wayne says. "When I'm with [the church] people, I'm just another person." Ask Wayne what the church and its life of faith has meant to him, and he will quickly reply, "These people saved my life."[2] Wayne knows what Jeremiah was talking about. Wayne knows the irony of the gospel, the truth that makes for full and joyful life does not look at life-giving from the vantage point of the wisdom of the world. But Wayne and the church people who honor him know—the difference between brown and green.

Maybe, then, we must know of the drought. Jesus once said that only those who humble themselves could know the rule of God. And Jesus taught that only those who lose their lives for the sake of the gospel could find them. Jesus told the story of a prodigal whose wandering in a wasteland made him hunger for the joys of home. So maybe when we have tasted the dust of the desert, felt the heat of foolish choices, and wandered once-promising paths that led to places of loss and pain, then we can look to the sky and pray for rain and look to the horizon of our hope.

Recently there was an exhibition at New York's Museum of American Folk Art of the drawings of an obscure San Francisco artist named A.G. Rizzoli, who died in 1981. He was the son of poverty-stricken Italian immigrants, and his work would be completely unknown had it not been rescued from a dumpster by a great-nephew. Rizzoli was shy and withdrawn. He lived by himself, working by day as a draftsman and toiling at night drawing pictures of those he loved: his mother, God, and the few people who were ever kind to him.

One day a year, Rizzoli would arrange his drawings in a room in his house and invite his neighbors in for a showing. He would spread

[2]Brant S. Copeland, "Scripture as Metaphor and Lens," in *The Register of the Company of Pastors* (Summer 1998): 5.

homemade signs announcing the exhibition throughout the neighborhood. But his neighbors were occupied with their own lives, and few of them took the time to come. Mostly, it was children, curious about this strange person who lived in their neighborhood, who would wander into Rizzoli's home and gaze at his drawings. "Those who did," writes Frank Rich in *The New York Times*, "would later themselves be adoringly enshrined in his pictures—though they never knew it. Love was for him its own private reward. 'No longer any reason for feeling lonely,' was the inscription he put on a portfolio."[3] Love is stronger than loneliness. Faith is more enduring than flame. The difference between brown and green.

(Ending) Jeremiah wants us to hear again the good news of the God who is. To those who wander in desert wastes, God is the oasis of compassion. To those whose lives are scorched by the noonday heat, God is the shade of rest and restoration. To those who are perishing from the thirst of meaninglessness, God is the fountain of living water, the rain that turns the dry places into fields of life. "When the rain finally came," said a Dust Bowl farmer, "it meant life itself. It meant a future. It meant there would be something ahead of you. And…we'd go out in the rain and just feel it hit your face. It was a very emotional time when you'd get rain because it meant so much to you. You didn't have false hope any more…"[4]

The difference between brown and green.

[3]Frank Rich, "Journal: Valentine's Day Massacred," *The New York Times,* February 14, 1998, A13.
[4]Floyd Coen, as quoted on *The American Experience: Surviving the Dust Bowl*.

2

Sermon as Journey to Celebration

This approach to preaching is perhaps the oldest one represented in this book. According to many historians, it preserves patterns of movement derived from traditional African religions. Brought from Africa to the United States by the enslaved, this approach was adapted to the service of the gospel as slaves became Christian. While this pattern has historically been characteristic of African American preaching, preachers in other communities are increasingly incorporating aspects of it. Professor Henry H. Mitchell is one of today's leading interpreters of this mode of preaching.

The pattern may be characterized as a journey to celebration. It is similar to a journey in that it moves from one point to another. This model has many possible ways to lead into the celebration and many varieties of celebration. Indeed, African American churches tend to value an individual preacher's distinctive adaptations of this model. The sermon is comprised of several blocks of material. The blocks of material and their relationship to one another are similar to the plot and moves of David Buttrick's approach to preaching (see chapter 12). According to Mitchell, Buttrick names aspects of this type of preaching that have been prominent in the African American community for centuries.[1]

[1]Henry Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 50.

The last block of material is a celebration. This part is indicative in tone: Preacher and congregation celebrate what God has done, is doing, and will do. The celebration is intended to empower the community with the good news of God's activity in their behalf. It is not exhortatory. The celebration is ecstatic reinforcement of the witness of the text and of the behavioral purpose of the sermon. At its best the celebration is good art in the service of gospel witness. The celebration makes up 10 percent to 25 percent of the message.

To prepare the sermon, the preacher identifies a behavioral purpose: what the preacher hopes will happen in the congregation as a result of participating in the sermon. The preacher determines what kind of journey has a good opportunity to help that behavioral purpose. The preacher develops the blocks of material that move from one to another in such a way as to get from the beginning of the sermon to the celebration. These materials should appeal to both intellect and emotion, providing an imaginative experience of the gospel as the congregation identifies with the movement of the sermon.

Two aspects of this pattern are difficult to represent in print. One is the vocalization of the sermon. The sermon starts at a very low level of intensity. At the outset, the preacher tends to speak slowly. As the journey continues, the preacher's rate of speaking and intensity increase. When the sermon reaches the celebration, the energy of the preacher overflows. Some preachers celebrate with a singing-like quality in the voice (sometimes called whooping, intoning, or tuning). The other aspect is the give-and-take between the preacher and the congregation. Sometimes referred to as call and response, the preacher states a part of the sermon—a paragraph, a sentence, a phrase, or even a word—and the community responds. At its best, call and response is a living dialogue between pastor and people. The pastor may even redirect the journey of the sermon in response to the people's reactions to the sermon.

Mitchell preached the sermon that follows at an annual meeting of the Academy of Homiletics held in Decatur, Georgia. The behavioral purpose is to encourage ministers to manifest integrity between what we say about the gospel and our day-to-day lives. In the language of the text, Mitchell wants us to become living epistles whose lives testify to the message we carry. After beginning the sermon, Mitchell leads the congregation on a journey through four blocks of material. (I) The text points to the necessity of us being living epistles. (II) The letters that we write with our lives can manifest integrity between what we say and who we are and what we do, or they can show a contradiction in those arenas. (III) Showing love for all people is the acid test of whether our message and