

DIGGING FOR TREASURE

HOLINESS & EVANGELISM IN A DIGITAL AGE

Edited by Paul H. Wilson



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Holiness and Evangelism in a Digital Age

Edited by
Paul H. Wilson

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Contents

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Paul H. Wilson</i>	
YOU SHALL BE HOLY	5
<i>Calvin T. Samuel</i>	
EXPOSITORY PREACHING AND HOLINESS	15
<i>Calvin T. Samuel</i>	
EVANGELISM AND EXPOSITORY PREACHING	29
<i>Elaine M. Lindridge</i>	
ASSEMBLING AN ACT OF WORSHIP IN A DIGITAL AGE	45
<i>Peter M. Phillips</i>	



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INTRODUCTION

Paul H. Wilson

Development Worker, Methodist Evangelicals Together

This series of contributions to the Digging for Treasure resources on expository preaching has addressed three fear-filled areas for the preacher: holiness, evangelism, and the digital age. Calvin Samuel has challenged us to examine how many times we preach on holiness. Elaine Lindridge has challenged us to preach evangelistically both inside and outside of the church walls. Peter Phillips shares his reticence to use digital technology in an act of worship, and how he overcame this. Each challenge has, however, offered the encouragement to explore further these important areas for preaching as we explore our charge to serve the present age.

Methodism and all denominations and streams of the church are facing the challenge of relevance and authenticity in presenting the transforming power of the good news of salvation.

At the turn of the 20th Century, John Lake sought to encourage people to recognise the power of the Bible, the transforming word of God. Someone heard the voice of God or experienced the power of God, and recorded the incident as the Word of God. He continued that the Scriptures were written for our encouragement, that if one person had an encounter with God, another person may. If one person encountered their sins forgiven, another person may. If another person experienced healing and transformation, another person may. The experiences recorded in the Bible are authentic and offer the

opportunity for the reader or hearer to encounter God and experience his transforming power.¹

Expository preaching, which warms the heart, stretches the mind and offers an encounter with God, is one way that Holy Spirit takes the written word to reveal the Living Word. We engage with the narrative of scripture to reveal the encounter of God with people then and reveal how those same experiences, challenges and themes are relevant today. The record of encounters with God help us to recognise our need for an encounter with God now.

I value Calvin Samuel's encouragement that the imperative, 'Be holy and the Lord your God is holy' (Leviticus 19:2), is not an unattainable goal but one which encourages us to progress in holiness. The holiness code of Leviticus 19 is attainable. The code gives us steps to follow. However, holiness is not simply legalism; it is a gift of grace by the Holy Spirit. We are not to be living under condemnation (Romans 8:1), but allowing the Holy Spirit to live in us (Romans 8:9) to lead us into life, not shaped by the world but by the word of God renewing our minds (Romans 12). Calvin is seeking to reclaim the charism of scriptural holiness and for the preacher to encourage our hearers to spread scriptural holiness through transformed lives. The challenge for the preacher is that we must first walk the path of holiness, a mark of our discipleship, as we encourage others to walk that path with us. We are challenged to practice what we preach.

Elaine Lindridge in expanding the 'evangelistic response' from simply a first step to a relationship with God, through Jesus, with the promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit, to transformed living. The list of changes in the disciples (p34) and others in the record of Scripture, when brought to the

¹ The Collected Works of John Lake, Kindle p.616.

attention of the hearer, takes each of us one step further on the road of discipleship. Each step is a step of conversion from sin to holiness. Each response is an act of transformation towards authentic Christian living.

Underlying these two complimentary presentations, are the famous ‘four alls’ of Methodism. All need to be saved; all can be saved; all can know themselves to be saved; and, all can be saved to the uttermost. Through whole-life discipleship, discerning and obeying the voice of God, we grow in holiness and maturity of faith in God. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, as he opens the Bible to us, speaks into our hearts and reveals Christ in and through us. Christians, living holy lives in the power of the Holy Spirit, become the salt of the earth and light of the world, who witness to God in word and deed, bringing glory and praise to God (Matthew 5:13-16). The call to holy living is a call to evangelism. Our lives become the Bible people read, used by the Holy Spirit to present Jesus to others.

Peter Phillips² encourages us and will continue to encourage us to use the tools of the digital age to help us present the gospel. He raises the area of authenticity in worship. In preparing the act of worship, he was both authentic to himself, the project, the culture, and variety of the congregation. Such authenticity has and will increasingly be the question of how we present the gospel so that it is accessible to all. Where this has been most successful in my experience, is in recognising the gifts of the congregation, and through team ministry, preparing an act of worship which will be accessible to the greatest range of people. Many preachers are still of a mind that they are responsible for the whole service. However, the increase in worship leaders and recognition of other skills needed in

² Due to illness, Peter Phillips was unable to speak at the Conference. Peter and Preach magazine gave their kind permission for the article published in Preach (Autumn, 2015) to be reprinted in this publication.

creating accessible worship will hopefully lead to a more collaborative ministry.

This Digging for Treasure book is one contribution from experienced practitioners in presenting the themes of holiness and evangelism in a digital age. It is written to encourage preachers from those beginning their ministry to those who have been preachers for many years to take up the challenge of these themes, to fulfil our calling to the present age. It is offered with the prayer that God will use it to bless your preaching ministry.

YOU SHALL BE HOLY: A SERMON ON LEVITICUS 19:1-4, 9-18

Calvin T. Samuel

Principal, London School of Theology

You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. These are challenging words. Some years ago, I was asked to lead a church weekend on the theme of holiness. Several people came up to me and said, 'I've been dreading this weekend for months'. Here's a tip, by the way: that's never something the person leading your church weekend really wants to hear! But it wasn't me they were dreading (at least that's what they said); they were dreading three days of hearing how badly they had failed in the pursuit of holiness.

You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. These are also liberating words. Because God is holy, we who are his people have the possibility of becoming holy.

What is holiness? One common understanding is to be set apart for God's special purposes. This a good understanding but perhaps inadequate when we ask what we mean when we say God is holy. Another way of thinking about holiness is as God's essential being. So to be holy is to reflect something of God's very being and nature. Perhaps my favourite description of holiness comes from an amazing woman called Ruth Etchells, former Principal of St John's College, Durham University, the only woman ever to have held that role in the College's 100-year history. She describes holiness in this way:

Holiness is the shining dazzle of profoundest divine love exchanged continually within the Trinity and poured out on creation in all its forms for our deepest and most joyful good.

Holiness is the shining dazzle of the glory of God. And the glory of God may be best understood as divine love exchanged continually within the Trinity and poured out for creation for our deepest and most joyful good.

Three things strike me here. First, that holiness is a shining dazzle. We don't tend to think of holiness as shiny. Most of us think of holiness as hard work, sober colours, seriousness. Etchells reminds us that holiness is a shining dazzle. It is attractive, like the burning bush of Exodus 3 that draws Moses closer.

Second, is the fact that holiness is rooted in divine love. This not only reminds us that holiness and love are necessarily linked, but it also reminds us that holiness is core to God's being. If holiness is rooted in divine love, and God is Love, then whenever we talk about holiness, we are in fact trying to describe that which is the very heart of God. It's one reason that talking about holiness can be so difficult because we are trying to describe the very heart of God.

Third, holiness is rooted in divine action. Holiness is divine love poured out on creation, for our deepest and most joyful good. Who does the pouring out? God. Why is the love poured out? For our deepest and most joyful good. Holiness is rooted in the gracious action of God. I find this liberating.

I grew up in a church that was very keen on holiness. It was emphasised and pursued; it was preached and taught and

modelled. But it was not gracious. Instead, it felt judgemental and legalistic. I don't know what I was taught about holiness, but I do know what I learnt: holiness was a long list of rules and things that you don't do. Holiness, sanctification, is not so much about what we do or don't do, it is in fact about what God does and has done in Christ; it is the product of God's grace. You are saved by grace; you are also sanctified by grace. Be liberated by that truth. You will never become holy because you work hard at it and keep all the rules. You can become holy because God has poured out divine love on creation for our deepest and most joyful good. Holiness is the shining glory of God. We are holy when we reflect something of God's goodness and glory in the world, a bit like the story of Moses in Exodus 34:29. His face was shining because he had been talking with God. When we are holy we reflect something of God's goodness and glory in the world.

This is what makes Leviticus 19 so interesting. It is an invitation, perhaps more appropriately a directive, to reflect something of God's goodness and glory in the world. There are four things I want us to notice about this passage:

1. Holiness is who God is
2. Holiness is rooted in loving action
3. Holiness requires communal expression
4. Holiness is possible through God's grace

1. Holiness is who God is

One of the striking things about Leviticus 19 is the repeated phrase, 'I am the Lord'. It occurs fifteen times in Leviticus 19. The writer is trying to say something here. The holiness to which God calls his people is important, not because it is God's special interest, but because it is the heart of who God is. Hear

the words of Leviticus 19:2 once again: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’ In other words, the holiness you are to exhibit reflects that which God exhibits in his very being.

Holiness is not primarily a descriptor of an attribute that humans pursue but rather the nature of God in God’s very being. Hence the repeated use of the phrase, ‘I am the Lord’. The behaviour and character that the people of God are called to exhibit is a direct outworking of the nature and identity of the God who calls.

Why should you keep the Sabbath? Because I am the Lord. Why should you leave gleanings for the poor? Because I am the Lord. Why should you care for the disabled, speak truth, love your neighbours, avoid stealing, reject slander and stand up for justice? Not simply because these things have intrinsic value, which they clearly do; but rather because I am the Lord. This is consistent with who I am. Therefore, it should be consistent with who you are if you are my people.

2. Holiness is rooted in loving action

It’s so easy to think of holiness as other worldly, or as some complex theological construct. However, holiness is rooted in loving action.

Holiness is actually the shining dazzle of profoundest divine love exchanged continually within the Trinity and poured out on creation in all its forms for our deepest and most joyful good.

Leviticus does not merely instruct Israel to be holy; it also gives clear indications of what this might involve. Interestingly, little of what follows in Leviticus 19 is airy-fairy stuff. Certainly, there are instructions about sacrifices to be offered, but most of it refers to how we love our neighbours as ourselves, especially those who are poor and powerless.

For example, v. 9: ‘When you reap the harvest you must leave gleanings for the poor and the alien’; v. 13: ‘you must not defraud your neighbour or keep for yourself a labourer’s wages until morning’; v. 14 gives instructions about treating those living with a disability with dignity; v. 20, protection for female slaves from exploitation by their masters. Moreover, if we read carefully, we find that Leviticus 19 is a restatement of the ten commandments of Exodus 20:

1. Have no other gods (4, 31)
2. Do not worship idols (4)
3. Do not profane God’s name (12)
4. Keep the Sabbath (3, 30)
5. Honour your parents (3, 32)
6. Do not steal (11, 13)
7. Do not murder (17-18)
8. Do not commit adultery (20-21)
9. Do not lie (11)
10. Do not covet (20-25)

It is also in Leviticus that we find the raw material for Jesus’ declaration that we should love our neighbours as ourselves (v. 18). Indeed, I believe that Jesus was a great reader of Leviticus. When Jesus taught that it is not enough not to commit murder, we also are not to hate in Matthew 5, that was not an original idea; we find it here in Leviticus 19:17. When Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 that too

is not original; we find instructions to love the alien in Leviticus 19:34.

3. Holiness requires communal expression

Holiness in Leviticus is not an abstract theoretical doctrinal concept. Leviticus does not merely instruct Israel to be holy; it also gives clear indications of expected behaviour in everyday life and in community.

To put it another way, holiness requires communal expression. Holiness is only holiness when it intersects with and interacts with and interchanges with the messiness of everyday life. Holiness is inherently relational, because it is rooted in love. To put this more simply, our interactions with other people provide our opportunity to grow in grace and holiness. Those interactions provide the context for our being holy. I have a revelation for you: your wife is not annoying; she is God's means of teaching you how to be holy. Your children are similarly not a source of frustration; they are God's catalyst for spiritual growth. Look at your neighbour and say, 'thank you for giving me an opportunity to learn and to live out holiness'.

It's not surprising that the instructions of Leviticus 19 are all couched in relational and corporate terms. Holiness is lived out in community. If you go off into the desert to seek after holiness, I don't think you will find it any more easily than you will find love. Holiness is primarily and necessarily communal.

Moreover, if it is true that holiness is actually the shining dazzle of profoundest divine love exchanged continually within the Trinity, and poured out on creation for our deepest and most joyful good, then several things begin to fall into place.

First, the communal nature of the very heart of the triune God shapes the communal conception and expression of holiness. Holiness is only ever communal because it is birthed in the triune eternal interchange of divine love. Second, if holiness is divine love poured out on creation, then that is itself a further expression of holiness in communal terms. Personal holiness does not mean private holiness. It requires communal expression. As Wesley put it, there is no holiness but social holiness. What we see in Leviticus 19 is very much socially and communally oriented.

4. Holiness is possible through God's grace

Perhaps the most important insight to be gained from this passage is that holiness is possible; through God's grace. Let's start with the first part of that sentence. Holiness is possible. Lots of us have believed a lie that holiness is not really possible, this side of heaven. It is an unattainable goal that we should constantly be reaching towards, but which we never grasp until we see Jesus face to face. Of course, there is a great deal of truth in this perspective.

However, if that is what you truly believe I have to tell you that you're not very Methodist, not very Wesleyan. We believe that holiness is possible. One of the reasons we believe it is possible is because we are instructed to be holy. God is not in the habit of instructing God's people to do something which is impossible for them to do. So, the fact that God says be holy, should fill us with hope because that command, that directive, that challenge is one to which we can respond positively. We can be holy.

Which of the things that follow in Leviticus 19 do we deem impossible? Leaving gleanings for the poor? We can do that.

Shun lies and stealing? We can do that? Love our neighbours? Do not hate your relatives? Do not exploit the disabled? Which of these things are impossible? None of them. Holiness is possible. However, it is possible only through God's grace. That repeated phrase, 'I am the Lord', is not simply a reminder of the character of the God who instructs us to be holy; it is also a reminder of God's capability. God does not only call; God also equips. Holiness is possible through God's grace. If the ground can be holy, if mountains can be holy, if Israel can be holy, you can be holy, because the same God that makes them holy sanctifies you.

Conclusion

You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy. This is not an optional extra; it is a call to a holy life for all who are the people of God. Because holiness is the heart of who God is, holiness has to be the heart of who we are as God's people.

Holiness is complex, not least because we know there is nothing that we can do to make ourselves more holy; holiness is properly is a descriptor of God alone. People, spaces, objects or times which are described as holy can only be so because they in some way relate or belong to the Holy One.

At the same time, we also know that holiness is never attained without effort, discipline, or obedience, without seeking, hungering and thirsting for righteousness on our part. Thus, holiness remains a mystery. Often we do not recognise ourselves to be holy, but others are able to see evidence of God's glory and grace in us. When Moses' face was aglow with the glory of God in Exodus 34:29ff, he could not see it but everybody else could. One reason for this is that the more we

grow in grace and holiness the more we become aware of our sinfulness and of our ongoing need for sanctification.

So, we return to those words of Leviticus: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.' How far is this true of our experience as a Christian community? How far is this our individual experience? Let us make that journey together. Let us dare to ask God to sanctify us by the power of the Spirit that we might truly be holy as God is holy. Amen.

**EXPOSITORY PREACHING AND HOLINESS:
WHY YOU SHOULD PREACH IT & HOW YOU SHOULD
PREACH IT**

Calvin T. Samuel

Principal, London School of Theology

Holiness is a key theme in the life of the church, first, because it is a critical theological category for our thinking about God. God self identifies as holy. In Leviticus 19 and 1 Peter 2 we read ‘You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am Holy.’ Second, holiness is an essential element of Christian discipleship, ‘You *shall* be holy’, and third, holiness is of strategic importance as the church engages in mission to the world. A holy church which reflects a holy God does not only seek to make disciples; it is also *attractive* when it does so. History has taught us that when the church is at its most godly that is also when the church is at its most attractive. People are drawn to other people who genuinely have something of God about them, which demands an explanation. Holiness is a key theme in the life of the church.

What do I mean by holiness? My favourite description of holiness is by a truly remarkable woman called Ruth Etchells, former Principal of St John’s College in Durham. She describes holiness in this way:

Holiness is the shining dazzle of profoundest
divine love exchanged continually within the

Trinity and poured out for creation in all its forms for our deepest and most joyful good.

Holiness is the shining dazzle of the glory of God. And the glory of God may be best understood as divine love exchanged continually within the Trinity and poured out for creation for our deepest and most joyful good. Holiness is the shining glory of the love of God.

You can see why I am persuaded that holiness is a key theme in the life of the church. And yet, it is my experience that preachers tend not to preach about holiness anything like as often as its importance would suggest. If you are a preacher when was the last time that you preached on holiness? If you are a regular church goer when was the last time you heard a sermon on holiness?

I confess that my interest in holiness may have something to do with my identity as a Methodist minister, nurtured within the holiness movement. That background means that I expect preaching on holiness to be a feature within my tradition. However, it is not so.

John Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism, was so convinced of the centrality of preaching holiness that he attributed a decline in attendance to a failure to preach holiness.³ He goes further in a letter to Adam Clark in November 1790, only a few months before his death:

³ In his journal entry dated 30 September 1765 John Wesley records: 'I examined the society at Bristol. I was surprised to find fifty members fewer than I left in it last October. One reason is, Christian Perfection has been little insisted on. And wherever this is not done, be the preachers ever so eloquent, there is little increase, either in the number or grace of the hearers.'

If we can prove that any of our local preachers, or leaders, either directly or indirectly, speak against it, let him be a local preacher or leader no longer. I doubt whether he should continue in society. Because he that could speak thus in our congregation cannot be an honest man.⁴

Here, I will explore two areas of preaching holiness. First, I would like to advance three reasons *why* we should preach holiness and then, latterly, go on to explore three suggestions for *how* we should preach holiness. The three-point sermon is alive and well.

Why we should preach holiness

Because holiness is biblical

Perhaps the primary reason we should preach holiness is because holiness is biblical. Early Methodists referred to it as scriptural holiness. The concern with holiness is something that we find across the pages of the Bible. In the Old Testament, we find this concern expressed in the sacrificial system and purification laws. This is especially the case in Leviticus where we find not only the command to be holy most sharply expressed in Leviticus 19:2, ‘you shall be holy for I am holy’, but also all sorts of laws to enable people to be holy in the presence of God. Indeed, the pursuit of justice in Leviticus is understood be an outworking of the holiness of God’s people.

⁴ John Wesley, Letter to Adam Clarke, November 26 17-90.

Similarly, among the Old Testament prophets, especially Elijah, Isaiah, Amos and Ezekiel we find a consistent call to holiness which requires justice. In the Wisdom Tradition, the Book of Job is very much concerned with the question of holiness, both Job's holiness and God's holiness, for the book of Job dares to ask, are we sure that God is holy? Look at how he treats his friends! The Psalms begin and end with the question of holiness. Psalm 1 begins: 'Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly ...' while Psalm 150 ends with praise in the sanctuary of the Holy One of Israel.

In the New Testament, the concern with holiness continues. We find it in the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, for example in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, not least the declaration in Matthew 5:48 that we be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Similarly in the New Testament Epistles, whether of Paul in Thessalonians and Romans, or Peter, or the anonymous writer to the Hebrews, we find a repeated and consistent call to holiness, without which none shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

It seems pretty clear to me, at least, that Scripture is very much concerned with the question of holiness. Why do we preach holiness? Because it's biblical.

Because holiness is who God is, the core of God's being

We preach holiness because it is biblical, but there are lots of things that are biblical. I suggest that holiness is not only biblical, but it is also important, indeed important to God. Holiness is important to God, not because it is God's hobby, not because God likes that kind of thing, but because it is

the heart of who God is. Hear the words of Leviticus 19:2 once again: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’

When God says ‘I am holy’, it is not like me saying ‘I am tall, dark and handsome’, because while this may be true, it is only one facet of my character. No, when God says ‘I am holy’ it is much closer to what I mean when I say ‘I am Calvin’. When I say that, I am not merely telling you what I am called; rather I am trying to tell you who I am.

Holiness, similarly, is not merely one of God’s characteristics; rather it is who God is. Holiness is the quintessential nature of God; it is the core of God’s very being. Walter Moberly argues that ‘holy’ is tantamount to a definition of the nature of YHWH.⁵ Christopher Wright concurs, ‘Holiness is the biblical “shorthand” for the very essence of God.’⁶ John Hartley states it more stridently: ‘Holiness is not one attribute of Yahweh’s among others; rather it is the quintessential nature of Yahweh as God ... Holiness thus distinguishes Yahweh from all other creatures.’⁷ Hartley continues, ‘In the entire universe ... [Yahweh] alone is intrinsically holy.’⁸

This, I suggest, is the second reason why we should preach holiness because it is important; it is the core of who God is. When we seek after holiness we seek far more than to be lovely Christian people; we seek far more than to be

⁵ R W L Moberly, ‘“Holy, Holy, Holy”: Isaiah’s Vision of God,’ *Holiness Past & Present* Ed. S C Barton, (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 127.

⁶ Christopher J H Wright, *Living as the People of God*, (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 27.

⁷ John Hartley, *Leviticus*, (Dallas: Word, 1992), lvi.

⁸ Hartley, 312.

committed to justice; we seek far more than to be people of integrity, as important as these things are. Much more importantly, when we seek after holiness, we seek nothing less than to become like God, to reflect God's glory and goodness in the world.

Because holiness is core to Christian discipleship

If it is true that holiness is God's quintessential nature, the very core of who God is, then it becomes clear that holiness is core to Christian discipleship. To be holy is to be godly. To be holy is to value what God values, to speak as God would speak, to reflect God's very being. Why preach holiness? Because it is core to Christian discipleship.

A great example of this we find in the story of Moses in the presence of God on Mount Sinai in Exodus 34:29ff. Having spent so much time with God, Moses descends from his mountaintop experience with his face so irradiated with the glory of God that he had to wear a veil for the next few weeks, perhaps months, until it came back to normal. Similarly, holiness is to reflect God's person and glory. That is what Christian discipleship is, to reflect God's person and glory. Holiness is the shining glory of God.

The ultimate reflection of God's person and glory is, of course, Jesus Christ; he is, therefore, the ultimate example of human holiness. To be holy is to be like Christ. Jesus taught many things, but perhaps most importantly he taught by his actions, not least his actions on the cross. What we see in Jesus is that to be holy, is to love our neighbours as ourselves; it is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and to give ourselves completely over to God even if it leads to suffering and

death. Holiness is core to Christian discipleship for it points us to God, it points to Christ. Holiness looks like God; holiness looks like Christ.

Why do we preach holiness? We preach holiness because it is biblical. We preach holiness because it is core to God's being. We preach holiness because it is core to Christian discipleship.

How we should preach holiness

Having discussed three reasons why it is important to preach holiness we now spend some time looking at three suggestions for *how* we preach holiness.

Preach holiness by grace and not works or legalism

First and foremost, it is critical to preach holiness by grace and not of works. When we remember that holiness is actually the shining dazzle of the glory of God, and that the glory of God may be best understood as divine love exchanged continually within the Trinity and poured out for creation for our deepest and most joyful good we remember that holiness is rooted in God's grace.

Three things strike me here. First, that holiness is a shining dazzle. We don't often think of holiness as shiny. Most of us are inclined to think of holiness as dour, hard work, sober colours, seriousness. Etchells reminds us that holiness is a shining dazzle. It is attractive, like the burning bush of Exodus 3 that draws Moses closer.

Second, is the fact that holiness is rooted in divine love. If holiness is rooted in divine love, and God is Love, then

whenever we talk about holiness, we are in fact trying to describe that which is the very heart of God. It's one reason that talking of holiness can be so difficult because we are trying to describe the very heart of God.

Third, holiness is rooted in divine action. Holiness is divine love poured out on creation, for our deepest and most joyful good. Who does the pouring out? God. Why is the love poured out? For our deepest and most joyful good. Holiness is rooted in the gracious action of God. I find this liberating.

I grew up in a church that was very keen on holiness. It was emphasised and pursued, it was preached and taught, and modelled. But it was not gracious. Instead, it was judgemental and legalistic. Holiness was a long list of rules and things that you don't do. Holiness, sanctification, is not so much about what we do or don't do, it is in fact about what God does and has done in Christ; it is the product of God's grace. We are saved by grace; we are also sanctified by grace. Be liberated by that truth.

We will never become holy because we work hard at it and keep all the rules. We can become holy only because God has poured out divine love on creation for our deepest and most joyful good. Holiness is the shining glory of God. We are holy when we reflect something of God's goodness and glory in the world. A bit like Moses in Exodus 34:29, our faces shine because we are in communion with God.

Preach holiness as primarily positive action rather than prohibited behaviour

If we preach holiness by grace and not by works, a complementary theme is to preach holiness primarily as positive action rather than prohibited behaviour. Holiness has a bit of an image problem; it is a word with negative connotations. When we think of holiness we sometimes think of holier than thou; we think of judgementalism.

Holiness is not always understood as a liberating thing. Holiness is so often a measure of how far we have fallen short. One of the problems of all talk about holiness is that it can easily make us feel inadequate, because we are reminded how much further we have yet to go.

Some years ago I was asked to lead a church weekend on the theme of holiness. A number of people came up to me and said, 'I've been dreading this weekend for months'. Here's a tip, by the way: that's never something that the person leading your church weekend really wants to hear. But it wasn't me that they were dreading (at least that's what they said); they were dreading three days of hearing how badly they had failed in the pursuit of holiness.

There is something wrong with that picture, isn't there? If the Gospel is good news, how is it that reflecting on holiness leaves us feeling inadequate and a failure? Something is wrong somewhere. In fact what is wrong, is that we so easily and so often misunderstand what holiness is about, what it is for, how it is expressed, and misunderstand what is the point of holiness.

Holiness is not primarily about prohibited behaviour; rather it is primarily about positive action. Indeed holiness is primarily about transformation. To pursue holiness is to acknowledge that all is not well, all is not right. Something needs to change, in individuals and in community, in our world.

In so many ways this is an obvious point. Of course, holiness is transformational. However, there are so many of us that do not really want to be transformed. We are who we are, we've spent a great deal of our time and energy figuring out who we are, our world affirms that we have the right to be who we are, and in an age in which tolerance is the supreme virtue, above all others, the idea that anyone should tell someone else that they are in need of transformation feels a little uncomfortable. We don't mind a little spit and polish, but we don't want to be transformed.

But the truth is, you need to be transformed; we need to be transformed; our churches, good Lord, need to be transformed. The problem with transformation is that challenges sometimes have to be made and sinfulness acknowledged. That is not an easy thing. The pursuit of holiness, confronts us with our own sinfulness and that is never an easy confrontation.

Here's the thing transformation: is not easy, and often not pleasant, but so absolutely necessary. Only in a community transformed by holiness can you say bless those who persecute you, do not repay evil for evil, if your enemy is hungry feed them. Transformation is not easy but necessary. Where transformation is not evident, God's

holiness is not present. Holiness is transformational. That is the primary positive action of holiness; it transforms.

Holiness is not only transformational, but it is also inherently missional; the two are closely linked. If holiness is divine love poured out on creation, holiness is a powerful witness to the love of God and the power of the gospel to transform communities.

To pursue holiness is to seek after God and God's power and grace. It is to seek to see God's love poured out on all creation. The love of God compels us. Holiness and love are integrally linked. We see this in Jesus' reaching out to tax collectors and sinners; in the early saints martyred for their faith; in the early Methodists reaching out to the least and lowest. We see this in the missionary movements going into the unknown, we see it today in Street Pastors, working in the unsociable hours when most of us are safely tucked up in bed.

Christian communities that pursue holiness will inevitably end up in mission. Quite often they don't think that's what they are doing. They are simply trying more fully to love God. But we underestimate how powerful a community is that is shaped deeply and passionately by the love of God. When we get it right, when we understand holiness as positive action, holiness is deeply and powerfully attractive. Unfortunately, it is also true that when we get it wrong, when holiness becomes prohibited behaviours, a set of rules to keep, it repels. I am not suggesting that holiness does not result in prohibited behaviours. I am suggesting that the transforming power of God will address those. What we need to *preach* is the positive action of the pursuit of holiness.

Preach holiness as God's promise rather than personal achievement

I suspect that perhaps the most significant reason why contemporary preachers are hesitant to preach on holiness is because we do not feel that we ourselves are particularly good examples of holiness. Therefore we shouldn't preach it because we aren't living it.

If my suspicions are true, on the one hand, I want to commend the sense of integrity that makes contemporary preachers reluctant to treat the topic of holiness. If you're not living it, you shouldn't preach it is a good rule of thumb. On the other hand, I also want to say to such preachers that they are mistaken. We preach holiness not as personal achievement but as God's promise.

To appropriate the words of Philippians 3:12, we preach holiness not as though '....I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.'

I want to suggest that this is a really good place from which to preach. It is certainly the place from which I preach holiness. I don't preach holiness from the mountaintop, from where I look down on those who have not yet attained the grace that I have already attained encouraging them to join me at the pinnacle of holiness, nor do I seek to encourage them by saying if I can do it so can you.

No, we preach holiness as those who are still ascending the mountain, those who slide back down on occasion, those whose faith is not yet made right, those who are still on the journey and fellow travellers. We preach holiness to

ourselves first and then to others because we know the darkness of our own hearts.

But do you know the best person to preach about grace is a sinner? The best person to preach about holiness is one who desperately longs to be holy, not just because it is an important biblical and theological truth, but because we know in our heart of hearts that we need the transforming grace of God in our own lives, because if we don't have God's grace we will be undone.

We preach holiness, therefore, not as personal achievement, but as God's promise. The truth of holiness is not based on my experience, but rather on God's promise. And what is that promise? It is ultimately the promise of liberation from the power of sin.

That promise we find in simple verses such as these: if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sin, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, 1 John 1:9. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied, Matthew 5:6. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, Matthew 5:48, is not so much prescription as it is promise.

How do we preach holiness? We preach holiness as grace not works, as positive action rather than prohibited behaviours, as God's promise rather than personal achievement. Holiness is ultimately about God's love rather than human failure, in other words, the story is not about really about the prodigal Son, it is about the inexhaustible love of the Father. How do we preach holiness? By never losing sight of God's love.

EVANGELISM AND EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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Introduction

Evangelism and Expository Preaching - some, perhaps most, would see these two concepts as being unlikely companions in our contemporary world. 'Evangelism' is often viewed as the proclamation of the Good News to those who have not yet responded whilst 'Expository Preaching' is the art of providing commentary on a passage of Scripture in order to make it more understandable to the congregation (most of whom have already heard and responded to the Good News). So how do they sit together? Should they sit together? Or maybe the title 'Evangelism And Expository Preaching' is a true paradox - seemingly a contradiction while expressing a possible truth.

Definitions are important, and the definition of the term 'evangelism' has proven itself to be a slippery little character. It is so much easier to say what it's not. Particularly as I have discovered that many people are quick to tell me what they do not like about evangelism - often their dislikes match my own and have little to do with my understanding or indeed engagement with evangelism. The overuse of evangelistic malpractice and evangelist caricatures often mask a much deeper problem than a dislike of evangelism. It shows both a misunderstanding and a lack of acceptance of the Good News and the call to follow Jesus Christ.

Before I use all my allotted time to define evangelism, let me align myself to the definition on the Methodist Church website, ‘Evangelism is being good news as well as telling good news, both in Jesus’ name and the power of the Holy Spirit’.⁹

What then of expository preaching? While the definition may seem obvious, the interpretation is far reaching. Expository preaching presents both the meaning and the intent of a passage of scripture - commentaries, examples and illustrations are all used as tools to enlighten the listener to the meaning of the text. The word *exposition* is obviously related to the word *expose* – therefore the expository preacher’s intent is to expose the meaning of the text, often, but not exclusively, verse by verse.

Expository preaching has often been held in high regard, but I wonder how many of us feel equipped to do it? The traditional understanding of what it means to deliver an expository sermon may need a review - particularly as many of us preachers were trained in a time when the principles of modernity shaped our instruction. Are we committed enough to rethink and retrain? Do we appreciate how much the world has advanced while, in comparison, our style of preaching and delivery of Sunday worship has changed little?

Preachers should not pretend to be what we are not....nor should we appear to have all the answers. I remember one particular Sunday preaching on a passage of Scripture I found difficult to accept. After reading the verses, I looked up and said, ‘I really wish Jesus hadn’t said that’. I remember a younger man at the back suddenly started nodding profusely.

⁹ <http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism>

I'd never even seen him look remotely interested in what I was preaching until I shared my real thoughts on these words from Jesus. Many preachers report similar experiences when admitting doubts, difficulties and lack of understanding of a passage. Thankfully, the days when this was actively discouraged are largely passed. The attempt to understand, explain, rationalise and neatly box up all the scriptures into our human thinking has proven to be not only impossible, but also unwise. There is, and always will be, a sense of mystery to God, and to God's word.

Putting together our definitions of expository preaching and evangelism poses us with a question. How do we 'expose' the word of God today by 'being the Good News and telling the Good news'?

Preaching from the church pulpit

How do we view the gathered community as we preach? Listening to various sermons, it seems that some preachers unwittingly make the presumption that a church service consists of the faithful, devoted disciples who have a depth of theological understanding and have attended in order to worship God and listen to the preacher. I'm not convinced this is the case - perhaps it never has been.

Gone are the days when a preacher can turn up at any circuit church with the same sermon and expect to be met by a generic Methodist congregation. The mix of worshippers, their interpretation and understanding of scripture, alongside their place on the discipleship path poses many challenges for the preacher. For some, the addition of attendees who occasionally visit as a result of a baptism, parade service or invitation, means there is a great likelihood that some will have

never before heard the name of Jesus Christ used other than as a swear word. So how does one preach in these varying contexts? I believe the answer to be both simple and yet profound...we preach evangelistically. We expose the Word of God in a way that speaks to the tiny congregation of elderly worshippers AND to the church full of invitees who find themselves in an unknown place hearing an unheard before message of love.

As Martyn Atkins puts it,

‘I believe the Christendom notion that settled churchgoers require ‘teaching sermons’ and only on the rare occasions when other folk turn up - and even rarer occasions when we move outside the church walls - is ‘evangelistic preaching’ required, is mistaken. Preachers should preach evangelistically to believers and non-believers alike, *for the benefit of all.*’¹⁰

As an Evangelism Enabler, I am often given a theme about mission or evangelism...but evangelistic preaching should never be about the guest preacher or a theme in a particular series. Rather it is core to every sermon because, in a sense, EVERY sermon should be evangelistic. Every exposition should expose the word of God and by doing so, should draw people to faith. Biblical truth, and therefore sermons, should always be contextualised by the gospel, by the Good News. Consequently, Christ centred preaching by its very nature must surely focus on the Good News.

¹⁰ Martyn D Atkins, *The Preacher’s Library. Preaching in a Cultural Context.* p.52 (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2001).

The great preacher Kingsley Barrett encourages preachers to preach about Jesus. In his sermon on the twenty first chapter of John, entitled 'Pastor and Witness,' he says,

'Never a sermon that does not have Jesus at the heart of it, never a sermon that does not speak his pardon for the sinner, his comfort for the sufferers. And never a sermon without the best thinking you are capable of; the simpler the congregation, the harder you will have to think.'¹¹

An evangelistic sermon is so much more than a formulaic apologetic, concluding with an appeal or call to the unconverted to follow Christ. Nor is it a theology-devoid talk using only illustrations and stories to convince the hearer to sign up to the Christian way of life. Rather, it is a true exposition of God's Word that seeks to show that God is One who seeks and saves the lost. But who is lost? It can be tempting to make that judgement for ourselves, but in doing so, we go against that which Christ taught us. I know at times I have felt lost and unsure of how to find God in a chaotic and violent world. A Christian for almost 35 years, a preacher for 27 years, a Methodist Minister for 21 years, I wholeheartedly and unashamedly admit that at times I need evangelising.

Evangelism, and therefore evangelistic preaching, is demeaned when it presumes only one response. Like countless others, I long to see more disciples and the Church has largely moved on from looking only for conversions as opposed to lives transformed. Unfortunately, evangelistic sermons have often worked contrary to this. While I applaud any preacher who

¹¹ Edited by Ben Witherington, *Luminescence, The Sermons of C.K. and Fred Barrett*, Volume 1. p.369.

offers a clear call to commitment, we need to be wary of making presumptions that commitment might look the same for everyone. Jesus as always is our example, and he did not call for the same response from every person he encountered. In Luke 5, we see the call to Levi meant he had to leave everything behind. For Simon and Andrew, the call to follow meant leaving their nets because Jesus was going to make them fish for people. To the would-be followers of Jesus, Jesus said, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.' To the rich young ruler, Jesus said 'follow me', but he was also told to sell his possessions, and give the money to the poor. The call to follow Jesus was given to Nathanael - but he had to leave his prejudices behind in order to hear it. The disciples were told that to follow Jesus meant they had to deny themselves and take up their cross, whilst Nicodemus was told he must be born again.

Jesus, as always, related to these people as individuals and while there was a generic call 'follow me', there was also the more specific explanation of what that might mean for each of them. In preaching the evangelistic sermon, the fullness of the call of Christ should be considered.

For the majority of people today, authenticity holds higher esteem than authority, qualifications or titles. So then, within expository teaching, the use of our own life story and experiences authenticate the words we say. The old teaching many of us received, that forbade the use of personal stories in sermons is not only outdated but also, I believe, limits the hearer's ability to ascertain if the spoken word is authentic, i.e. does it actually make a difference in the preacher's life.

I remember training at Cliff College and the lecturer stated that if our sermons did not present an offer or challenge, then

they were lectures, not sermons. Surely the overarching aim of any sermon is to call for a faith response. When we think of expository preaching as exposing the Good News, then the offer of Christ (in whatever way) makes perfect sense.

So then, expository, evangelistic preaching, in a local church context, offers the hearer the opportunity to respond to the invitation of Christ to become his followers. This is regardless of whether they have never heard that invitation before or whether they have heard it, and maybe even responded to it, on countless previous occasions.

That is reason enough to encourage evangelistic preaching. But furthermore, it seems harsh to expect congregations to share the Good News with others when they do not themselves hear it shared from the pulpit. Preachers, we have a responsibility as bearers of the Good News, and as such should be an example to others.

Each time a preacher preaches an expository sermon, to a degree she offers up her own life to be ‘exposed’. The literal words from her mouth are only part of the sermon. How then might a life well lived, act as an evangelistic exposition?

The message of the messenger?

‘So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.’¹²

¹² 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

As Paul shared with the Thessalonians, he appreciated that the need to give of himself and not just deliver a message. Any dichotomy between the Word spoken and the Word made flesh is a false one. The Word made visible in our lives speaks more powerfully than the most eloquent of sermons.

We can never seek to explain everything. The definition of any word or concept or passage of scripture begets an ever increasing fountain of more words. Words alone will never be adequate in trying to explain the Good News, therefore, living a holy life becomes the literal illustration of our evangelistic exposition. Generational studies tell us that today's seeker may well say, 'don't tell me, show me'. The old way of preaching absolute truth (regardless of whether it is true or not) simply does not figure in the postmodern rational. The desire to see words authenticated as the speaker literally lives out their own message has never been greater.

Just as we have asked how the sermon 'exposes' the Good News, so we should ask the same question of our lives. Yes, of course, we proclaim with our words - but proclamation also happens through deeds, attitudes and lifestyles. Or as Aaron Edwards puts it,

'to "proclaim" something means to show a clear and unambiguous link between what one says, what one means, and what one does as they say it.'¹³

¹³ Essay by Aaron Edwards. Kierkegaard as Socratic Street Preacher?: Reimagining the Dialectic of Direct and Indirect Communication for Christian Proclamation

Edwards continues;

‘Kierkegaard was aware that in order to preach directly, one’s life must become a part of the communication itself. It is for this reason that he says: “Truly it is a risk to preach!” Preaching is “risky” because preachers themselves are (indirectly) communicating whether their sermon “works” or not by how much it has (or has not) affected their own life. No preacher is afforded the luxury of being a mere passive conveyor-belt of information.’¹⁴

So then the message and the messenger are intrinsically woven together. Again, Mr Barrett reminds us of the necessity of a Christian life echoing the words and increasing the witness of the messenger. He talks to the whole congregation when he says,

‘You don’t suppose, do you, that witnessing is a mere matter of preaching only? Far from it. This Church as a whole is Christ’s witness - its corporate life. Go back to the last night in the life of Jesus. What lesson did he give his intimate disciples? Was it a lesson in homiletics, the art of sermon construction? It was not. I daresay they needed that, but they needed something else more. He gave them a lesson in foot-washing. This is the sign; he said, ‘If you really love one another, love one another like this. People will know’. That is a fundamental of the Christian proclamation.’¹⁵

¹⁴ Essay by Aaron Edwards. Kierkegaard as Socratic Street Preacher?: Reimagining the Dialectic of Direct and Indirect Communication for Christian Proclamation.

¹⁵ Edited by Ben Witherington, *Luminescence, The Sermons of C.K. and Fred Barrett*, Volume 1. p.373.

With only our words, answers are too frequently offered to questions that no one is actually asking. However, with our lives, we can communicate a completely different message as we show how being a follower of Jesus helps as we navigate the chaotic and often difficult terrain of life.

Wesley frequently expressed his view that lifestyle was linked to the fruitfulness or otherwise of mission. His letter to George Merryweather is a case in point:

‘Where Christian perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached, there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God; and consequently, little addition to the society, and little life in the members of it ... Till you press the believers to expect full salvation now, you must not look for any revival.’¹⁶

Wesley, never one to pastorally soften his words, goes on to state that ‘the grand stumbling block to the general spread of the gospel is the lives of Christians.’¹⁷ Preaching, or any apologetics without a holy life belies what has been said and therefore becomes counterproductive to evangelism.

Preaching from different pulpits

Any book, conference or lecture on preaching is almost immediately translated into thinking about preaching from the pulpits and lecterns known by the hearer or reader. But what if those ‘pulpits’ were in different places? They are, after all, just the place from which the sermon is preached....so in

¹⁶ <http://homepage.mac.com/craigadams1/WESPERF/SECTN17.html> Letter to George Merryweather 8 February 1766.

¹⁷ Wesley’s sixty-third sermon.

considering the life of the preacher as a walking, living sermon, where might today's pulpits be? Imagine with me the pulpit in the supermarket, or around the meal table, or in the pub, or at the sports event, gym, community centre....or even on the streets. Perhaps preaching elsewhere is inappropriate & even outrageousness,but does that not remind us of a certain Galilean preacher? The Word was made flesh and moved into the neighbourhood¹⁸ - not simply to speak about God but to point to God by his very life.

As a young, new Christian I remember being asked if I had considered preaching. There was almost the presumption that I was called to preaching because I was young, enthusiastic, relatively eloquent and not afraid to speak up. As an aside, these characteristics do not equate to a call to preach. My response at the time was to say, 'there are enough people in our pulpits and not enough on the streets'. I admit that I was also perhaps headstrong and a little cocky (some would say I still am). But regardless, probably because I came from a non churched background, I struggled to understand why Christians put so much effort into what happened in the Church building and so little effort into sharing the Good News with those (like myself) who had not grown up in the Church. The dichotomy between going to Church and being an everyday disciple was something that confused me then and still concerns me today. As a typical teenager who thought she knew it all, I had never heard of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, so imagine my delight when I realised he agreed with me! He states that 'preaching should not be done in churches but on the street, right in the middle of life, the actuality of ordinary, weekday life.'¹⁹

¹⁸ John 1:14 The Message.

¹⁹ Christian Discourses: And, The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress, By Søren

Now obviously I am not referring to a three point sermon declared publicly in a similar manner to the 20 minute slot given over in a Sunday service. But be aware - I am not ruling out the concept of preaching in different places. As we move further out of Christendom, do we retreat further into our buildings? For Methodists, this might seem like a denial of our roots. We applaud how Wesley preached in the fields and declared the world to be his parish - but do we follow his example? While not excluding fields as such, the opportunities afforded to Wesley are even more numerous offered to us today. Dream with me of the sharing of The Word in the supermarket, at the family outing, in the pub, and yes, maybe even on the streets. This kind of preaching only makes sense if we see the message as permeating ever sphere of the preacher's life. Almost as if the message has so gripped the messenger that she cannot not preach and share The Word, regardless of geography. Not confined to any brick building or wooden pulpit but liberated to proclaim Christ with the same reckless abandonment that we saw in Wesley.

How The Message Is Heard

For some, the message is literally heard for the first time. For those who still see Britain as a nation with inherited Christian values, it can be hard to believe that we live among people who have never, ever heard the Good News. They are our neighbours, our work colleagues, and occasionally our friends and family.

Research commissioned by the Church of England, Evangelical Alliance and HOPE discovered some very interesting responses

Kierkegaard, *JP* 6:6957, 562.

to the people's perception of Christians²⁰. 67% of people know an active follower of Christ, and broadly speaking, they view Christians in a positive way. 1 in 5 is open to a conversation about Jesus. I have found this to be true in recent times through my involvement in an ecumenical mission in Newcastle city centre that basically mobilised and trained several hundred people to go into the city and share faith. This was linked with the work of Baptist minister Yinka Oyekan. While not engaging in street preaching as such, it was undoubtedly a time of sharing the Good News, largely with those who had not heard it before. The response from the large majority of those encountered was not disinterest or offence. Most were open to a conversation about Jesus - the majority were happy to be prayed with.

For those preaching evangelistically, it should always be remembered that the message is controversial. While involved in the mission in Newcastle city I told one young man that God loved him and had an amazing plan for his life. He gave an incredulous gasp in response and asked 'does he really?' The Good News is a time splitting, life changing, paradigm-shifting message of hope that is contrary to much of our culture and context. In some ways, it is scandalous - particularly when the life and words of Jesus are shared. Just think for a moment about how his teaching about the first being last for example, might challenge our Western way of living? In some ways, as Christians, we have become desensitised to many of the words of Jesus. We forget the radical and sometimes offensive things that he said and did. Let us be aware as we preach and share

²⁰ <http://www.talkingjesus.org/research/talking-jesus-booklet.cfm>

the Good News that at times we will do so with a people who may respond in shock.

As already stated, the actual words may be heard in different ways depending on the life lived by the preacher. But perhaps the message is also affected not just by deeds, but also by our attitudes. We know that actions speak louder than words, so alongside our actions, what might our body-language, attitudes, life views, engagement with the world, add or take away from our verbal message? The hearer 'hears' so much more than simply our words. One such hearer cuts through the words and states very eloquently what he can truly 'hear',

'I am disappointed with Christianity when it mistakes me as a box that needs ticking or a category of person that needs defining or worse rescuing. I am disappointed with Christianity when it's presumed I am in the wrong, or on the wrong side. I'm disappointed with Christianity when I am spoken to with hidden agendas, rather than being spoken to as a family member or at least your neighbour. I'm confused by Christianity when I can't see your God in you. However, I might be interested in a Christianity when you meet me as an equal, rather than someone who knows more than me. I might be interested in a Christianity that offers me more than an opportunity to offer a prayer request but cares as much for my physical world as it does for my spiritual. I might just be interested when the light in your eyes and your countenance, as well as the actions of your words, reveal to me, the glory of a God, I might just want to know. Because you introduced him to me by first truly

seeing who I am through the eyes of your Jesus who you say I need to know.²¹

Conclusion

There's nothing quite like the smell of home-made bread. Our home is often filled with that beautiful aroma (thanks to a breadmaker!). As I've experimented with different recipes, I have come to appreciate that in order to get the bake and rise that I expect with the kind of bread that pleases my palate, I need to stick to the five essential ingredients - flour, sugar, water, yeast, fat. If I miss one, then the dough doesn't work. Yes, I can add extras, milk powder, bran, seeds, olives - they all give wonderful variety. But the essentials cannot be messed with.

Expository, evangelistic preaching using words, but neglecting lifestyle is like bread without yeast. Likewise, may I add, that good deeds without the offer of Christ (at an appropriate time) is equally disappointing and like the bread that was never given a chance to rise.

We have Bread to offer to a nation who has a deepening spiritual appetite. It is a privilege that carries with it great responsibility. It still astounds me that God should choose us - fallible, weak and at times broken people, to partner with him in showing love to others.

The principles already outlined, remind us that the proclamation of The Word - regardless of whether it is from a

²¹ An anonymous source.

pulpit, the street or the pub - is only fully made known through the interwoven message delivered through both words and lifestyle. And there by the grace of God go us all.

ASSEMBLING AN ACT OF WORSHIP IN A DIGITAL AGE²²

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When CODEC was asked to prepare the weekly college communion service, the biggest issue for us was how not to make the service so different that it completely alienated the congregation. Worship, after all, is the worship of the people - the offering of ourselves as living sacrifices, our reasonable or spiritual act of worship (Romans 12). That act is a corporate act, borne out of the authenticity of our community together (John 4:21-24, 1 Corinthians 12-14), the gathering together of a congregation which offers its very best to God in an act of spiritual worship. Indeed, that passage in John could be interpreted to mean that our worship has to be authentic to our specific congregation - owned by us. Jesus criticises the Samaritans for not understanding worship properly (they had rejected the concept of Jerusalem as the central place of worship and established an alternative cult centre on Mount Gerizim) and argues that since salvation comes from the Jews, they know what they are talking about. But he then goes on to argue that God is seeking out worshippers who will worship in the Spirit and in truth (or in the Spirit of Truth) for they are the kind of worshippers God seeks. So authenticity and worship go hand in hand.

²² The article was first published in *Preach*, Autumn 2015 and is used by permission of the publisher.

How then were we to fulfil a mandate to lead worship, to plan the whole service, but at the same time to be authentic both to our own identity as a research centre exploring digital culture and the congregation's authenticity as an ongoing, multi-tradition, multi-age congregation within the broad context of the Church of England?

The first thing we decided was that we were not going to create an alien, gimmick-laden form of worship which took people out of the context of worship that they were already engaged in. We ruled out a whole list of possibilities: the use of gadgets and devices to engage in the service; social media engagement as obligatory at any point; techno-jargon; virtual communion. Instead, we began to explore how the worship of the ongoing community could be made richer by the incorporation of digital culture. Incorporation is an important word - the embodiment of digital culture within an already embodied community and context. What we were not being asked to do was to create an online experience but rather to lead an act of worship that was already embodied although with some occasional live streaming to allow others to engage with the worship from a distance. We needed to work with the worship band, the preacher, the stewards, the chaplain, the volunteer readers.

Of course, this doesn't mean to say that authentic worship must be embodied in this particular way. There are plenty of acts of worship which exist primarily online - from @Poppy_Tweet (a *Twitter*-based remembrance service), to d-church²³ (a monthly service), to online community-based congregations like St Pixels (stpixels.com) and online campus-based worship such as *Livechurch.tv*. These acts of worship are

²³ bit.ly/d-church

authentic in that they provide worship for a gathered group of people (whether they are gathered synchronously or asynchronously, geographic or dispersed, online or offline) in a manner that is authentic to them. Indeed, the organisers of each of these acts, and the many others not mentioned, have put the acts of worship together in such a way as to engage with the congregation's own adherence to the principles and practices of digital culture. This is authentic digital worship.

Anglican, Catholic and Methodist churches have tended to argue that the celebration of the Lord's Supper cannot happen online. The reasons for this are complicated in that they involve three key principles - the gathering and recognition of the body of Christ, (priestly/ministerial) presidency of the act of worship, and the blessing of the bread and wine by that president. Despite Paul Fiddes' important article from a Baptist point of view, and despite the correct assertion in the literature that the Holy Spirit is not bound to man-made rules about the liturgy, none of the larger churches have yet sanctioned an online celebration of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. As such, another element of the service becomes restricted to offline practice - one congregation, one act of communion, one location, one president, one bread and wine.

The decision that we made was that we wanted to create a rich, multi-sensory context for worship and to draw elements into the worship from the wider context of the world Church. In other words, we were always asking how the digital would enhance what we were doing rather than distract from what we were doing. How could we enhance the gathering of the community, the prayers, the reading of the Word of God, the sermon, the act of Communion. How could we make what already happened in the act of worship a much richer and deeper experience by the incorporation of digital culture? Part

of this reflects back on the idea that the celebration of Communion is a celebration of the whole Church - militant and triumphant - the universal Church on earth and the universal Church of heaven. As such, inclusion of world Church elements reminded us of the wider context of our own local celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Of course, curating digital worship does not just mean playing with technology - digital culture is much richer than being techno-nerds. Digital culture also focuses on the use of all of our senses, in the gathering of the community, in the centrality of that community around the focus of our worship, in the participation of the many rather than the few. We wanted to bring all of these elements together in what we actually did. So what did we do?

- We mapped out a worship space that encouraged people to see one another worshipping, on helping us as a body to recognise the body of Christ as the other people gathering with us - worship in the round, gathered around a simple Communion table in the middle with a candle, cross and Bible, making good use of the three screens in the hall which ensured that everyone could see the words for the liturgy and for the songs.
- We composed a digital soundtrack with accompanying visuals for people as they came into the environment and dimmed the rest of the lighting - encouraging people to focus on the music, the visuals, the repeated comment #WhoAmI.
- We opened the act of worship with some acoustic worship songs, during which people were invited to go and write on screens and express their response to the call to worship in pictures, words or symbols.
- We asked two of our colleagues in research centres across Europe to read the Bible passages chosen - both

chose to read in English. We used an audio recording of their voices and asked a digital illustrator within the congregation to accompany the readings with live digital illustrations on the screens. He chose to do this by adding colour to previously mapped-out designs on his screen. These were highly effective.

- We crowd-sourced the prayers from around the world using a request on *Facebook*. We managed to gather prayer requests from every continent and to link these with local prayer requests. Members of CODEC led the prayers from four points around the congregation.
- Crucially, our preacher, Calvin Samuel, teamed up with digital illustrator Matt Lawrence to plan how they would work together to enhance the preaching. Calvin gave Matt an overview of where he thought the reading would be going, aided by some crowd-sourced ideas about people's appreciation of the character of Pilate. Matt worked up some ideas of how he could illustrate what Calvin preached. The result was a stunning visualisation of the three different public faces of Pilate and a challenge to all of us engaged in public ministry to query our own public image.
- We based aspects of the liturgy throughout the service on liturgies from the Church of England, Iona and the Methodist Worship Book. Since I am Methodist, I wasn't bound to one form of worship and so could adapt the words to include some aspects of digital presence and engagement.

The service went down very well. Some of the comments we received included:

- general appreciation for the layout
- awareness of the use of all the senses and the options given for involvement in the worship

- engagement with the visual - especially during the sermon
- acceptance of the changes to the liturgy to focus on digital aspects of the worship.

The key impact of the evening for most was the partnership between preacher and illustrator. In a discussion group the next day, over 90 per cent of those present said that it added further depth to an already good sermon. Many expressed how it had helped them to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the words. Some said that they took the decision to focus on the pictures alone, a few that the pictures put them off. The majority loved the mixture of word and art. What we only found out later was that both preacher and illustrator adapted their plans, their words, their brushstrokes during the worship itself - in other words, as Calvin preached he responded to Matt's drawing and in turn Matt was responding to Calvin's preaching. The preached Word became the living Word in a real live interaction which enhanced the worship and encouraged both preacher and illustrator in their God-given gifts.

So, having initially been anxious about leading an act of worship specifically from a digital viewpoint, we found that adhering to a few key issues enabled us to do something slightly different, something creatively exciting, and something which brought depth and richness to the community's worship life. These were our key learning points:

- Be authentic, both to the community you are leading in worship and to your own identity.
- Make the best use of technology in terms of creativity, depth of experience, opening up opportunities for

others to be involved both locally and from a wider world church perspective.

- Don't do technology for technology's sake.
- Work with the other creative people in the congregation and bring together both traditional gifts (preaching, worship leading, prayer) with new digital creativity (music, visuals, illustration, presentation).
- Be open about what you are doing and why you are doing it.
- Allow people to engage with the service in their own way and make use of what you have provided to find their own way into the heart of God's presence.

Next time, I won't be anywhere near as anxious to develop an act of worship with a digital dimension. Working with lots of people in the congregation, we developed an act of worship which was creative, inspiring, and responsive to the Spirit - a truly spiritual act of worship which we pray was acceptable to the Lord.