

MCCORMICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HEART, MIND, SOUL AND STRENGTH:  
ENGAGING THE LISTENERS' WHOLE BEING  
THROUGH THE INCORPORATION OF CREATIVE ARTS INTO PREACHING

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN PREACHING

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2009

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTERS	
1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, COGNITION AND CREATIVITY	1
<i>My Context: Worship at Manhattan Mennonite Church, Manhattan, Kansas</i>	1
<i>The Search for Creativity</i>	3
2. THEORY: CREATED WITH MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES	10
<i>Theology: Created as Whole Beings</i>	10
<i>Theory: Understanding Creation and Cognition</i>	12
<i>Proposal: Integrating Creative Arts into Preaching</i>	18
3. PROJECT: INTEGRATING CREATIVE ARTS INTO PREACHING	22
<i>The Parish Project Group</i>	22
<i>Evaluating the Project Sermons</i>	24
<i>Changes in Sermon Style Throughout the Project</i>	27
4. CONCLUSIONS: SOME LEARNINGS FROM THE PROJECT	33
<i>Messages and Meaning</i>	33
<i>Engaging Emotions, Intuition and Intelligences</i>	36
<i>Collaboration and Creativity</i>	41
APPENDICES	
A. SERMON OF JANUARY 14, 2008: <i>Towards a New Dawn</i>	47
B. SERMON OF SEPTEMBER 14, 2008: <i>The Sacred Space of Grief</i>	52
C. SERMON OF OCTOBER 26, 2008: <i>Joe Average</i>	58
D. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS	63
SOURCES CONSULTED	64

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the use of the creative arts of music, drama and visual arts in preaching. The thesis emerges out of a congregation set in a highly academic environment in which the author discerned the need to preach sermons that stimulate not only the intellectual capacity of the listeners, but the emotions and intuitions as well. Drawing upon the theory of multiple intelligences as advanced by Howard Gardner, the author has presented sermons incorporating diverse artistic media as a means of engaging these various intelligences. Feedback to these sermons was solicited through both written and verbal responses in order to measure the effectiveness of the creative arts in reaching the listeners in ways that move beyond merely intellectual engagement. The thesis posits that the use of such creative elements can be an effective way of addressing the whole beings of the listeners and engaging the different modes of intelligence present in the congregation.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, COGNITION AND CREATIVITY

#### ***My Context: Worship at Manhattan Mennonite Church, Manhattan, Kansas***

It's 10:35 on Sunday morning at Manhattan Mennonite Church. With the morning worship service just ten minutes away, parishioners are filing into the sanctuary. From the moment one steps into the building, the creative arts begin to lay the groundwork for the entire worship experience. The worshipers are greeted by lively notes played on mandolin and guitar by a couple who has performed professionally. The music quiets the congregation as members greet friends whom they haven't seen all week. Children of all ages gradually bring an end to excited talk with their classmates as they enter the sanctuary from the Sunday school classes that have just ended.

Among the last to arrive for worship are the students from Kansas State University, which is located only a few blocks away. They fill the back couple of rows on the west side of the sanctuary. As they look around the room, the students might see some of the professors they've had in class over the past week, but who this morning are their fellow worshipers. Virtually all of the fifty or so adults gathered either have or are pursuing a college degree. Roughly a third possesses a graduate degree. Nearly every household includes at least one member who is or has been employed by the university.

Soon the music stops, but conversations continue quietly until the worship leader for the morning, a retired educator herself, steps up to the pulpit to welcome the congregation. The sixth and seventh graders are just now arriving since their Sunday school discussion extended past the usual ending for the education hour that precedes worship. After a few brief announcements shared by various members of the congregation, the worship leader invites everyone to a time of quiet reflection in preparation for worship. The mandolin player, now shouldering a violin, plays a hauntingly beautiful tune as members of the congregation listen in silence and gaze around themselves, meditating

on the worshipful setting.

The morning sunlight streams through stained glass windows, brightening the room. The candles on the altar are lit, providing a warm glow to remind the congregation of the presence of God's Spirit. A worship display next to the candles has been thoughtfully arranged by a member of the worship committee to reflect the morning's theme. Banners created by various past and current members of the congregation artistically enhance the theme for the day or the season. The mood for worship is set without any words being spoken.

Then the guitar player invites everyone to stand and join in singing a contemporary chorus in praise of the Creator. The voices of the congregation echo jubilantly in the room. After the song, the worship leader returns to the pulpit to lead a responsive litany of gathering and praise. Following a brief prayer of invocation, the congregation is invited to participate in singing four-part harmony to an old familiar hymn that speaks to their souls and connects them to the Divine presence. After the hymn, the musician who has been playing mandolin and violin now plucks a rousing tune on banjo while the offering is enthusiastically received by a in intergenerational team of ushers.

Soon the children are invited to come forward for the children's message, an interactive presentation designed to creatively impart the morning's message to the younger folk and (if truth be told) keep the adults engaged as well. The children, who make up a little more than a third of those in attendance, are regarded as a valuable part of the worshiping body. A layperson from the congregation shows pictures, tells a story and hands out objects to hold to remind them of the lesson that is imparted. Preschoolers are dismissed to the nursery where they can continue to be engaged in a way that speaks to them, while allowing the rest of the congregation to give their full attention to the worship service.

A reverent reading of the two scriptures for the morning comes next, interspersed with another congregational hymn. On some weeks, a readers theater or dramatic presentation helps to shed new light on the ancient text. On others, the choir might perform a number that draws the congregation ever

deeper into the worship experience. The arts continue to be woven into the service in a manner that enhances the worship encounter.

Then comes time for my sermon. I step up to the pulpit and deliver a lecture, reading a theological treatise in which I hope to instruct the flock and share some insight on the text. The message is biblically informed, theologically sound, competently written and reasonably well-delivered. Many in the congregation, accustomed as they are to the academic setting, follow the reasoning closely and find the intellectual tone stimulating.

Yet many of the parishioners, whose spirits and senses had been engaged in a variety of ways up to this point in the worship, now find their minds wandering. As they gaze at the stained glass, the banners and candles, they lose track of the point I am trying to make. The uplifting emotions that they experienced up to this point in the worship service begin to fade. Thoughts turn to lunch plans, the afternoon ball game and the tasks facing them as they return to work or school tomorrow.

Once the sermon is over, the worshipers are welcomed back into God's presence as they come forward to partake in the Lord's Supper. They taste and feel the body and blood of Christ while music again engages them. After communion, they interact directly with one another as various people stand to share their responses to the worship service and to pass along their joys and concerns to one another. A final pastoral prayer brings before God all that has been shared and experienced. The service then draws to a close with a blessing pronounced upon all those gathered. The congregation exits the worship area, sent forth by the same joyous sounds of guitar and mandolin that had welcomed them at the start of the service.

### ***The Search for Creativity***

The foregoing description represents a fairly accurate, albeit slightly exaggerated, account of what often happens in a worship service in my congregation. I have the sense that relatively few of my parishioners would describe my sermons as "boring" or "dull." Yet it is not an overstatement to say

that, as in many churches, my sermon all too frequently has stood in stark contrast to the creative, multi-sensory engagement that may be found in many other parts of the service.

After nearly fifteen years of preaching almost every Sunday—more than half of that time in this same congregation—I was sensing that my approach to sermon preparation and delivery had become largely a technical act rather than a creative process. As I entered the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS) Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program in the summer of 2006, most of my sermons were following a very similar outline. The same familiar themes were cropping up in my preaching nearly every Sunday. Each week was becoming an exercise in “cranking out” another message as I felt myself running out of things to say and interesting ways in which to say them. Like many who preach in the same setting for a number of years, I was struggling to maintain a creative edge in continuing to communicate the good news to many of the same people week after week and year after year.

Through all of this, I was also aware that my natural tendency is to intellectualize my messages. I am interested in scholarly thoughts and rational ideas. Such an approach is generally well received in the highly-educated university setting where I pastor. I was becoming increasingly concerned, however, that my generally “heady” approach was not fully addressing the hearts and needs of the congregation. While the intellectual stimulation was welcomed by and comfortable to many of my parishioners, I was concerned that I was neither challenging them nor truly helping them to experience God's full presence in worship.

As the preacher, I often felt that the general flow of creativity in worship ground to a halt when I stepped into the pulpit. I couldn't help feeling that something of a divine spark was missing from many of my messages. While intellectually stimulating, my sermons were not really fostering a divine encounter for the worshipers. To put it another way, I was doing a good job of helping my congregation to *think about* God, but not a very good job of helping them to actually *experience* God

through my sermons. In a sense, the sermons were running counter to the general intention of the overall worship service. Thus began my search for enhancing the creativity within my preaching.

The congregation that I serve is unusually blessed with many people who excel at various creative arts included music, drama and visual arts. As the foregoing description illustrates, their gifts are regularly expressed in the worship services in many different ways. Throughout my work for the Doctor of Ministry program, I have therefore sought for ways to integrate my preaching more fully into the overall worship experience of the congregation by incorporating into the sermons themselves many of these creative arts that make that worship experience so meaningful.

In setting out on this venture, I was aware that I was running counter to certain tendencies in both my own Mennonite tradition and in the broader North American Protestant church. To begin with, the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition has long been suspicious of the arts, particularly in the context of worship. One early leader of the movement, for example, may have anticipated the “worship wars” of current times by several hundred years as he recommended singing “spiritual songs” in worship, but warned that “he who enjoys listening for the music's sake—he hears in the letter and not in the Spirit, so with him also is it without fruit; . . . he that so does sins greatly against God; for he uses his word, which was given for his salvation and as an urge to blessedness, as leading to the lust of the flesh and to sin.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, published in 1955, reflects on this deep suspicion of the arts on the part of the early Anabaptists, noting that “With their emphasis upon simplicity, sincerity, and humility, art seemed to them artificial and pretentious, often dangerous and wasteful.”<sup>2</sup> Mennonite historian Cornelius Krahn reports a similar history in an editorial written a few years earlier in which he traces the sharp divide between word and art:

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1 Peter Riedeman, *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton in conjunction with the Plough Publishing House, 1950), 123, excerpted in *Anabaptism in Outline*, ed. by Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 131. Riedeman originally wrote this in 1542.

2 Nanne van der Zijpp and Dirk Kossen, "Art (1955)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A78ME.html> (Retrieved January 13, 2009)

When Protestantism discovered the Bible as the *word of God* and the highest authority in matters of faith and worship, works of art came to be regarded as hindrances rather than as aids in salvation and worship. For some, everything except the *word of God* became associated with idolatry. Hence, the house of God became a plain white-washed building with nothing but the Bible in the center. This was the *church of the word* in opposition to the church of ritual, aesthetics, and tradition.”<sup>3</sup>

The most extreme contemporary example of this rejection of arts in the Anabaptist tradition can be found in our Old Order Amish cousins who still adhere to a very simple style of dress and shun any visual depiction of a person as the making of a “graven image.” While modern Mennonites have not gone so far in their rejection of visual art, most Mennonite church buildings constructed prior to the mid-twentieth century are quite simple—even austere—in design. There was little or no stained glass, and not much decorative work of any kind. To this day, one is less likely to find banners, candles or even crosses in a Mennonite sanctuary than in most mainline Protestant churches.

Drama, too, has traditionally been frowned upon as the portrayal of a character other than oneself is viewed as a type of deceit. Dance has been strongly opposed due to its association with sexuality and with misuse of alcohol. Of all creative arts, only music has been embraced by Mennonites for centuries. Even then, many Mennonites would have traditionally rejected instrumental music, allowing only for *a capella* singing in worship. As recently as 1956, the president of the Mennonite Board of Education warned against the use of pianos at Mennonite colleges by declaring, “Our Anabaptist tradition of ‘Koinonia’ will suffer a serious blow if and when instruments come in.”<sup>4</sup>

While the rejection of such creative arts in the tradition have clearly drawn upon theological tenets of simplicity and humility, both Krahn and the writers the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* agree that the traditionally rural and isolated nature of the Mennonite church has also been a major factor in the continuation of these attitudes. Krahn argues that the early Mennonites, driven by persecution into more remote areas, “developed skill as farmers; and as such they worked in the studio of the Master

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3 Cornelius Krahn, “Mennonites and the Fine Arts,” *Mennonite Life* 3, no. 2 (April 1948): 3.(emphasis in original)

4 Nelson Kauffman, quoted in John E. Sharp, “Safeguarding a capella singing,” *Hesston College Today*, Fall 2008, 14.

Artist. Thus, in their own way they developed skill and taste in creating beautiful things.”<sup>5</sup> He also hopes that in the increasingly urbanizing world of the mid-twentieth century “Mennonites artistically inclined who heretofore considered it necessary to leave the fold in order to develop their talents and find a receptive field for their endeavors, will more and more realize that their contributions are greatly needed in their own constituency.”<sup>6</sup>

Over the past half century, Krahn's hope has indeed turned into reality as attitudes towards creative arts have changed dramatically within the Mennonite church. Our increased contact with and involvement in the broader culture has resulted in a greater appreciation for the arts. In the process, we have also come to realize that our Anabaptist forebears rejected much that was valuable in their break from both the Catholic church and the broader Protestant movement in the sixteenth century. For generations, we took so seriously our understanding that H. Richard Niebuhr described as “Christ against culture”<sup>7</sup> that we refused to accept many cultural and aesthetic elements, condemning them as “too worldly.”

More recently, however, Mennonite theologian Duane Friesen has rejected Niebuhr's approach. Rather than viewing “Christ” and “culture” as “two monolithic entities separate from each other,” Friesen contends that “we must begin with a view of Christ as the concrete presence of God *in the world of culture*.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, he goes so far as to argue that “all Christians are called to be artists. When we honor God with our heart, soul, and mind, we order the cosmos to be in tune with God's intention for it.”<sup>9</sup>

The result of such attitudinal and theological changes is that today I not only feel quite free to draw upon the arts in worship, I am even encouraged to do so by denominational leadership. The

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5 Krahn, 3.

6 Ibid.

7 In speaking of this typology, Niebuhr declares that “The Mennonites have come to represent the attitude most purely.” H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 56.

8 Duane K. Friesen, *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City: an Anabaptist Theology of Culture* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 52-53.(emphasis in original)

9 Ibid, 169.

president of the same college that acquired a Steinway piano in the 1940's, thus provoking the warning from the president of the board now praises “the power of the fine arts to evoke profound thought and reflection. At their best, the visual and performing arts help us to connect with God, our creator, and the great artist.”<sup>10</sup> As Mennonite seminary professors June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf and Rebecca Slough note, “Worship leaders and pastors do well to use the rich variety of arts appropriate for worship . . . to serve our telling of God’s saving story.”<sup>11</sup> The description of the worship service at Manhattan Mennonite Church in which creative arts play an important role is by no means unique among Mennonite churches in the twenty-first century.

Still, even in a congregation such as Manhattan Mennonite where the arts are welcome in worship, there is a sense in which visual and performance arts are always subordinate to the spoken and written word. The traditional emphasis on the *word of God* still gives clear priority to the written or spoken word over creative arts. When, for example, the worship committee creates a new visual display or a banner without words on it, there is generally a request for some sort of note in the bulletin to “explain” verbally what the visual representation is supposed to “mean.” The art is not often seen as speaking on its own without some sort of verbal interpretation. In attempting to integrate the arts into my sermons, however, I have hoped to allow the arts to engage persons in and of themselves, not merely as illustrative material to the spoken word.

Another tendency in contemporary worship to which this project runs counter is the widespread use of PowerPoint, movie clips and similar technologies. Indeed, many who have heard of my project have initially assumed that I was seeking to draw upon precisely such digital technology to project images or present video segments as part of my preaching. I, however, have had several reservations about such an approach.

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10 Howard Keim, “The power and value of the fine arts,” *Hesston College Today*, Fall 2008, 3.

11 June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf and Rebecca Slough, *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 183.

From a purely practical standpoint, Manhattan Mennonite Church does not currently own the equipment necessary for this sort of multimedia presentation. While I am by no means averse to using technology appropriately, I am cautious about adopting new technologies merely for their own sake. I am also quite wary about the inherent consumerism that comes with the constant need for upgrades and additional peripherals that accompany any new multimedia system. Although the policy of Mennonite Church USA does not prohibit or restrict the use of current technologies, we still value simple living.

In addition, I was also concerned that reliance on technology might simply lead to a “quick-fix” approach. I have seen too many churches make use of their equipment in a shallow and ostentatious way that does little to illuminate the message. The goal too often appears to be to entertain rather to inspire—to be “socially relevant” rather than genuinely creative. Showing a few video clips, for example, has too often been a substitute for genuinely and creatively engaging the scripture in such a way as to make the message meaningful today. Instead of investing in such technology, therefore, I have hoped to draw upon the expertise of many talented and creative individuals in the congregation to assist me in injecting creative arts into my sermons. I have chosen to invest in the human resources available rather than in technological resources.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORY: CREATED WITH MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

#### *Theology: Created as Whole Beings*

One might reasonably ask why the undertaking which I propose is an important one. Aside from the practical consideration of not wishing to bore one's listeners, what value is there in seeking to engage the congregation through the incorporation of creative arts into preaching?

In answering this question, I begin from the theological perspective that God has created us as whole beings made in the very image of the Creator. There have long been those who have understood the human capacity for reason to be the distinguishing characteristic of our species. Our unique ability to think is no doubt a key aspect of what it means to reflect *imago dei*—the image of God. Yet while intellect is a fundamental identifying feature of humans, we are more than just intellectually advanced animals. We are complex creatures who experience the world through a multitude of senses and means of comprehension. Our emotions and intuitions are also key to our experience of *imago dei*.

The Bible repeatedly affirms this understanding of the human being as an entire system with various interrelated parts, and calls upon us to devote all aspects of our being to God. For example, the ancient *shema* commands God's people to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus himself repeats this directive when challenged to name the greatest commandment.

In fact, Mark's account quotes Jesus as expanding on this command by declaring that one should “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, *and with all your mind*, and with all your strength.”<sup>13</sup> The addition of “mind” to the list of the various aspects of human personality serves to address the Greek understanding of heart and mind as two separate and distinct entities, as

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12 Deuteronomy 6:5 (NRSV)

13 Mark 12:29 (NRSV; italics mine)

opposed to the Hebrew concept in which the heart is the seat of both the emotions and the intellect.

These differing formulations of the command within scripture also caution us against anointing any single model as the *only* way of conceptualizing the various aspects of our being. What is significant is not the precise number of levels or factions of human personality and consciousness. Rather, what is important is the recognition that we are a complex set of various interwoven components, each of which plays a crucial role in reflecting the image of God. Our devotion to God therefore requires the devotion of all of these various components.

Christian corporate worship, then, is rightly seen as a time when worshipers come together to open their entire selves to the Divine presence. Through worship, the believer's whole being is engaged so that one is truly capable of loving with heart and soul and mind and strength. The overall goal of communal Christian worship is “an encounter with the triune God experienced in the midst of community, which transforms and empowers members of Christ’s body for loving witness and service in the world.”<sup>14</sup> In order for such transformation and empowerment to occur, the worshipers must be engaged at a variety of levels.

Preaching, as one of the central acts of worship, must likewise touch the listeners' entire beings: heart, soul, mind and strength. Since it occurs within the context of worship, the sermon must be more than merely the transmission of information or even persuasion toward a particular point of view. While preaching may be both informative and persuasive, the understanding to which I have come through my own practice is that the sermon—as all of worship—should primarily be *experiential*.

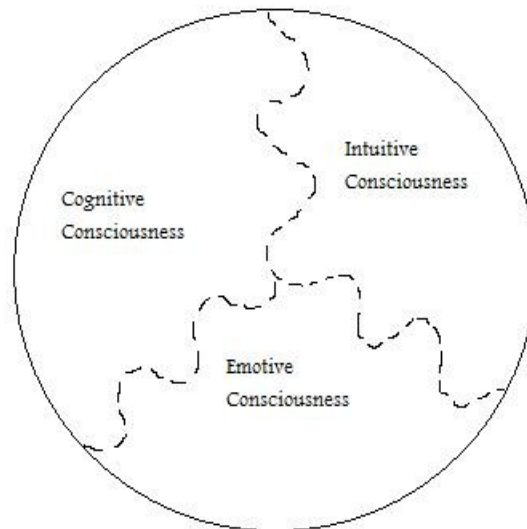
Henry Mitchell draws upon such an understanding of preaching as he proposes a model of the human consciousness that consists of three interlocking and interacting sectors: cognitive, intuitive and emotive. In outlining the way that these various aspects of human consciousness interact regarding faith, Mitchell states, “Reason may make straight the highway or prepare the path, but faith invades our

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14 Yoder, Kropf and Slough, 162.

lives through the *intuitive* and *emotive* sectors of consciousness.”<sup>15</sup> This then leads him to the conclusion that preaching must be directed not only to the cognitive sector, as much of preaching has traditionally done, but also to the emotive and intuitive sectors. Indeed, “To opt to deal with fewer than all the sectors of human consciousness is to fail willfully to deal with the whole person.”<sup>16</sup>

I have found Mitchell’s graphic presentation of his theoretical model to be very useful in visualizing and implementing my project. In presenting the diagram reproduced below, Mitchell notes that “Every time we preach, we preach to the whole person, our options being limited to emphasis on one or two, as opposed to the other two or one.”<sup>17</sup>



My attempt throughout the preaching project that has led to this thesis has been to appeal more consciously to and emphasize the emotive and intuitive sectors through the use of creative arts. While the cognitive sector cannot be ignored, it is my contention that this area has too often been over-emphasized in Western Christian preaching in general and in my own preaching in particular.

### ***Theory: Understanding Creation and Cognition***

Contemporary psychological theory has affirmed the understanding of the human creature as a complex amalgamation of different ways of perceiving and understanding. Psychologist Howard

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15 Henry Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 23.(emphasis in original)

16 Ibid., 35.

17 Ibid., 55.

Gardner labels these various faculties “Multiple Intelligences.” Dissatisfied with traditional IQ tests that measure only certain aspects of human abilities, Gardner set out to discover and document various ways that human beings know and interact with the world. Rather than subscribing to a single understanding of “intelligence,” Gardner contends “that there is persuasive evidence for the existence of several *relatively autonomous* human intellectual competences, . . . and that they can be fashioned and combined in a multiplicity of adaptive ways by individuals and cultures.”<sup>18</sup>

Although Gardner emphasizes the relative independence of each of the intelligences that he has identified, he also recognizes that “These intelligences are fictions—at most, useful fictions—for discussing processes and abilities that (like all of life) are continuous with one another; Nature brooks no sharp discontinuities of the sort proposed here.”<sup>19</sup> From a theological perspective, one could also posit that God (Nature with a capital “N”) brooks no sharp discontinuities between heart, mind, spirit and strength. All are distinct, yet deeply interrelated, components of humans.

While Gardner uses the language of “intelligences,” he admits in his more recent work that he considered labeling the various aspects of human personality that he studies as “human faculties” or “capacities” or simply “gifts.” While speaking of “giftedness” may have carried a more existential or theological understanding, Gardner ultimately chose the psychological language of “intelligence” which he defines as “a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture.”<sup>20</sup>

This definition is more refined than Gardner's original one, which focused more on the *ability* to solve problems or create products as opposed to the *way in which one processes information* in order to achieve such ends. In explaining his refined definition, Gardner posits that the intelligences he has identified are “potentials . . . that will or will not be activated, depending upon the values of a particular

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18 Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 8-9. (emphasis in original)

19 *Ibid.*, 70.

20 Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 33-34.

culture, the opportunities available in that culture, and the personal decisions made by individuals and/or their families, schoolteachers, and others.”<sup>21</sup> It is my contention that preachers may be among those “others” whom Gardner mentions who may make “opportunities available” to engage and activate the various “intelligences” present in the culture of any congregation.

Gardner's original writing on this subject identified seven different kinds of human intelligence: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and two forms of “personal intelligence”—intrapersonal and interpersonal. Since that work, published 25 years ago, he has also recognized “naturalist intelligence” as an eighth distinct category.

Many have suggested that spiritual and/or moral intelligence might be a ninth possible kind of intelligence. Gardner, though, has not found that these categories meet the strict criteria that he has established to recognize any of them as a distinct form of intelligence. In some of his most recent writing, however, he does admit that “existential intelligence” might be a candidate for another possible category of intelligence—referring half-jokingly to a current list of “8½ intelligences.”<sup>22</sup>

Gardner affirms that all humans possess all of these intelligences. Indeed, he contends that this full range “is what makes us human beings, cognitively speaking.”<sup>23</sup> Here Gardner's language hints at a theological understanding of humans uniquely created in God's image. His concept of a set of intelligences that makes us human is not so far removed from the concept of the *imago dei* which is reflected through the multiple capacities for intellect, emotion and intuition that make the human creature uniquely able to relate to the Creator.

There is still tension between Gardner's focus on “solving problems or creating products” and the purpose of worship that I have identified: an experiential encounter with God. One might stretch Gardner's definition to say, however, that the “problem” which worship seeks to “solve” is the question

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21 Ibid, 34.

22 Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 21.

23 Ibid., 23.

of how one loves God with one's entire being. Or perhaps the “product” that is “created” in worship is “an encounter with the triune God” that results in “loving witness and service in the world.”<sup>24</sup>

The various intelligences that Gardner identifies do not easily equate with the biblical categories of “heart, mind, soul and strength.” The intelligences are the ways in which humans process information. In Gardner's framework, such “information” is not limited to that which Mitchell might categorize as cognitive, but would include anything that appeals to the emotive and intuitive consciousness as well. Thus the multiple intelligences are not the same as “heart, soul, mind and strength.” They are rather the various means by which these innate human capacities are addressed.

Christian worship must therefore seek to engage the various intelligences of those who gather so that all might adequately process the “information” presented in worship in order to respond with their entire beings. The preacher must appeal to all of the intelligences in order to elicit a response from heart, soul, mind and strength. Indeed, there are many ways that worship services do appeal to a variety of these intelligences already. A brief summary of how these intelligences are defined and how they are typically engaged in worship is thus in order.<sup>25</sup>

**Linguistic Intelligence** is the sensitivity to the meaning and structure of words. One who excels in this intelligence is able to move others and to explain concepts using words. Gardner holds up the poet as the prime example of a person who is strong in this intelligence.<sup>26</sup> In worship, this form of intelligence is drawn upon through spoken litanies, the reading of scripture, and the texts of hymns.

**Musical Intelligence** focuses upon one's ability to appreciate and organize musical elements such as pitch and rhythm. The person who is strong in this mode of intelligence is likely a good singer, instrumentalist and perhaps composer. The appeal to musical intelligence in worship is obvious in the congregational singing, instrumental accompaniment and other musical performances that are found in

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24 Yoder, Kropf and Slough, 162 (also cited on page 11 of this document).

25 This summary draws upon various works of Howard Gardner and on Thomas Troeger and H. Edward Everding, Jr, *So That All Might Know: Preaching That Engages the Whole Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008).

26 Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 73-77.

virtually every service. Appeals to this intelligence are also present in the rhythm and tone of speech used by the worship leader and/or preacher.

**Logical-Mathematical Intelligence** is the form of intelligence most often associated with “scientific thinking,” and most commonly understood as a traditional type of intelligence. One who exhibits this intelligence is capable of analyzing problems, seeing how concepts fit together and deducing logical outcomes. In worship, this intelligence often guides the overall structure and flow of the service. Many passages of scripture also clearly draw upon this form of intelligence in constructing and presenting logical arguments.

**Spatial Intelligence** is the ability to perceive the visual world accurately and to manipulate or re-create either two- or three-dimensional objects. Those who are especially strong in this intelligence are likely to be able to read maps and understand directions, or to excel in visual arts. The architecture and arrangement of the worship space is key to engaging the worshipers' spatial intelligence. Visual displays such as banners, flowers and other symbols also appeal to this intelligence.

**Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence** is found in the mastery of one's own body. While Western thought has traditionally made a sharp division between body and mind or intelligence, Gardner asserts that skilled use of the body is indeed a form of intelligence. The person who is strong in this intelligence may be an athlete or dancer, or one who is skilled in fashioning objects with his or her hands. Worship draws upon this intelligence whenever the congregation is invited to engage in some sort of bodily movement such as kneeling or genuflecting, or coming forward to receive communion.

**Interpersonal Intelligence** is the ability to perceive and understand the moods, temperament, motivations and intentions of others. One who is strong in this area is likely to have many friends and to work well in groups. The passing of the peace is one act of worship that engages this intelligence. The interaction of the children's story and sharing of personal testimonies are other ways in which worship appeals to such intelligence.

**Intrapersonal Intelligence**, in contrast, is the form of intelligence which focuses on the self. It is a deep awareness of one's own feelings, goals, abilities and shortcomings. The person who excels in this intelligence tends to work better alone and to process thoughts and feelings internally. Silence and time for personal meditation or reflection such as prayers of confession are aspects of worship that engage this form of intelligence.

**Naturalist Intelligence** is found in sensitivity to the natural world. It seeks to recognize and distinguish the variety of plants, animals and geographic and astronomic features that make up the created universe. Those who are strong in this intelligence are likely to be attracted to natural science—especially biology—and to engage in outdoor activities. While worship most often takes place indoors rather than in natural settings, the presence of flowers or green plants, references to nature in hymns and scripture readings and the water of baptism all draw upon this form of intelligence.

A typical time of worship thus appeals to a variety of intelligences in many ways throughout the service. Preaching in the Western tradition, however, has traditionally been focused upon addressing only two of these modes of intelligence: linguistic and logical. While there are ways in which sermons can and do draw upon other forms of intelligence, these two have been primary.

The appeal to linguistic intelligence comes through the spoken words that have been the primary vehicle for communicating the message that the preacher offers. One of the evidences that Gardner cites for a high level of linguistic intelligence is “the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals.”<sup>27</sup> Preachers have traditionally understood that goal as *persuading* their listeners to accept certain theological tenets or to engage in certain ethical behavior. If, however, the goal of the preacher is to engage the whole beings of the listeners so that they might more fully encounter God's presence in worship, then reliance on words alone would seem to be inadequate to the task.

Traditionally, sermons have also tended to follow logical structures from rational premise to

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<sup>27</sup> Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed*, 41.

well-reasoned conclusion, thus engaging the congregation's logical-mathematical intelligence. Such a sermon is often an extended argument in which the preacher takes on the role of an attorney presenting a case, with the congregation reduced to a jury that is expected to respond with the appropriate verdict.

As valuable as these two forms of intelligence may be, they are not the only ones present in the congregation. Nor are they fully adequate to the goal of moving the congregation towards a genuine encounter with the Divine. Reliance upon linguistic and logical intelligences above all others leads to a disproportionate appeal to only a portion of each individual's whole being and risks alienating those in the congregation for whom other modes of intelligence are primary. As Thomas Troeger and H. Edward Everding, Jr. note, "Certainly preaching involves talking and making logical connections, but MI suggests we can also involve congregations in seeing images, singing songs, using gestures (dancing?), exchanging comments, exploring their feelings, or appreciating a floral arrangement."<sup>28</sup>

It is this challenge presented by Troeger and Everding that I have hoped to address in my Doctor of Ministry in Preaching project. I have attempted to preach in such a way that my preaching engages the listeners' entire being. Whether one envisions the human creature to consist of heart, soul, mind and strength or cognitive, intuitive and emotive consciousness or a set of multiple intelligences through which we perceive the world, it is clear that we are created as complex beings who are called to experience and respond to our Creator with every aspect of our being. Preaching must thus seek to engage various aspects in order to move the listeners toward a more complete worship experience.

### ***Proposal: Integrating Creative Arts into Preaching***

The means by which I have tried to engage the members of my congregation as whole beings have been through the incorporation of creative arts into preaching. While these certainly may not be the only means through which one might accomplish the stated goal, the use of creative arts is one that I deemed worthy of exploring in greater depth as one way of more fully engaging my listeners. Duane

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<sup>28</sup> Troeger and Everding, 51.

Friesen, for one, encourages such an approach in arguing that “The arts illuminate the religious dimension of human life by symbolically representing the underlying tones or moods of human existence, what some have called the 'religious affections.'”<sup>29</sup>

Friesen differentiates “religious affections” from emotions by noting that “Emotions are responses to particular events in our lives, such as rage at injustice or sorrow and grief in the face of death.” On the other hand, he argues, “The language of religious affections refers to basic moods or dispositions of life: trust as opposed to despair, or joy and gratitude as opposed to bitterness and cynicism.”<sup>30</sup> This statement is reminiscent of Mitchell’s description of the emotive consciousness that underlies any specific emotional responses one might have. Friesen contends that aesthetic experience is crucial to communicating such affections:

The arts are vehicles for expressing the religious affections. They open our spirits to a sense of wonder, to the sheer mystery of being itself, before which we stand in amazement. Or they put us in touch with our imperfection and brokenness, the fragility of life, our underlying sense that our lives are utterly dependent upon God or that we live in the context of powers beyond our control.<sup>31</sup>

As previously noted, creative arts already play a number of key roles in worship in many churches. These arts are able to appeal to many of the intelligences that we humans possess. As Yoder, Kropf and Slough have recognized, “The arts used in worship can reveal aspects of God’s redeeming story in ways that are accessible and relevant to contemporary worshippers. They can disclose the hidden dimensions of God’s presence. They provide expressive channels through which the congregation can enter God’s continuing story of redeeming love.”<sup>32</sup>

Yet with all the arts that are present in a worship service, rarely have the arts been brought directly into the sermon itself. There have been many articles written and seminary classes taught on “The Art of Preaching.” The title is a recognition that preaching is, indeed, a creative process rather

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29 Friesen, 197.

30 Ibid. Friesen here draws on the work of Richard R. Niebuhr in *Experiential Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 44.

31 Ibid, 197-198.

32 Yoder, Kropf and Slough, 162.

than merely a technical one. In all the attention given to preaching as an art, however, relatively little seems to have been done to explore how the art of preaching could interact with other arts.

Mitchell does suggest that arts such as poetry, music and drama can provide a starting point to create the celebratory atmosphere that he commends. Yet even in doing so, he cautions that many “find it hard to worship authentically in these new and unavoidably alien ways.”<sup>33</sup> Among the various examples of celebratory sermons that he includes in his book, he rarely draws explicitly upon the arts. When, for example, he commends the use of a character sketch, it is a third person storytelling about Paul rather than a first person dramatic monologue as though he were the apostle himself.<sup>34</sup> The closest he comes to truly integrating arts into a sermon is the imagined dialogue he conducts with David, which concludes with a dramatic presentation of Psalm 51.<sup>35</sup>

As noted above, Troeger and Everding have made some suggestions regarding the use of creative arts in preaching as one way of engaging the multiple intelligences of the parishioners. They, too, provide examples of possible sermons intended to speak to various intelligences as personified by several fictional characters: Affiliating Al, Bargaining Betty, Conceptualizing Charles and Dialectical Donna.<sup>36</sup> Their sermon manuscripts also provide notes along the way explaining how various characters might be engaged at different points.<sup>37</sup> In spite of the suggestions they present, however, Troeger and Everding likewise never provide any tangible examples in these sermons of the “seeing images, singing songs, using gestures (dancing?)” to which they refer.

It appears, therefore, that there is work to be done in more fully exploring the use of the arts in preaching toward which Mitchell, Troeger and Everding point. While these authors provide a good theoretical framework for the incorporation of creative arts into preaching, I sensed a need to experiment with this theory by putting it into practice. I have not been able to find many concrete

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33 Mitchell, 31.

34 Ibid., 104-107.

35 Ibid., 132-136.

36 Summaries of these characters can be found in Troeger & Everding, 106-107.

37 Ibid., 109-121.

examples of anyone thoroughly engaging in this endeavor that they recommend. It is instead the task that I have attempted to carry out myself.

In doing so, I have not meant to suggest that spoken or written words are not valuable in worship. Rather, I hope to correct and expand on the too-limited understanding of *word* that many preachers and their parishioners have implicitly accepted. When, for example, my own Mennonite forebears sought to establish “the *church of the word* in opposition to the church of . . . aesthetics,”<sup>38</sup> they created a false dichotomy. For the Word of God exists not only as a linguistic phenomenon. The Word is certainly not confined to such categories as law, reason and exhortation. The Word made flesh is indeed a living, creative, multi-dimensional Word. It is this Word that I have sought to illuminate and to help my congregants not only to understand but also to experience through my preaching.

There appear to be ways in which a more creative and intentional use of the spoken word can impact the congregation in a more experiential manner. The movement, for example, from argument, logic and diatribe to poetry, story and metaphor is an important step in such a direction, and one that many other preachers have sought to take. My interest has been to push this movement even further by fully incorporating a variety of creative arts directly into the act of preaching.

By drawing upon various creative elements that were already present in the worship service and integrating them into the sermon as well, I have hoped to create a more unifying worship service that continues to engage the senses and multiple intelligences of the worshipers at all points during the service, including the sermon. My goal throughout the three years of my project has been to integrate the creative spoken word (story, poetry, metaphor, etc.) with creative arts (drama, music, visual arts) in my preaching as a means of appealing to listeners’ multiple intelligences and ultimately deepening their experience with the Divine. As I carried out the project, it became clear to me that I needed to reconsider and clarify just what such integration means and what it looks like.

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38 Krahn, 3.(emphasis in original)

## CHAPTER 3

### PROJECT: INTEGRATING CREATIVE ARTS INTO PREACHING

The process prescribed by the ACTS program is to work with a Parish Project Group in one's ministry setting to formulate and evaluate a series of sermons in which the preacher explores a particular issue or concern. The sermons must also reflect learnings from classes taken by the preacher during each of the three-week summer residency programs. Three such sermons are preached in each of the first two years of the program, and two in the third and final year. Each of these sermons is recorded on video and submitted, along with a reflection paper written by the preacher, to two individuals for feedback.

#### *The Parish Project Group*

With the goal in mind of incorporating creative arts into preaching as a means of deepening the listeners' encounter with God, I set about carefully choosing the Parish Project Group (PPG) with whom I would work throughout my three years in the program. This group assisted me in the formation and evaluation of each of the project sermons throughout the three-year process.<sup>39</sup>

I sought to include people from the congregation who brought different creative gifts. This was very important since I knew that I would be relying heavily on the talents of others in shaping, presenting and evaluating my sermons. I made sure to invite persons into my PPG with abilities in music, drama and visual arts. I also looked for people with the technical skills to record the sermons and others gifted in evaluating projects and interpreting such evaluations. Finally, I also sought a diversity of people in terms of age, gender, length of time in the congregation and, to the extent possible in our predominately white congregation, race. Working with the various members of this

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<sup>39</sup> Of the seven individuals who participated in the PPG in the first year of the project, four continued to be part of the group for all three years. Several other persons were part of the group for a year or two. In all, a total of ten individuals served on the PPG, with six or seven participating at any given time.

group proved to be extremely valuable throughout all three years of the project.

The influence of the PPG on my sermons during the first two years was quite evident. For one sermon, they gave suggestions for how a scripture passage might be written today, which I then combined into a readers theater. Various members also recommended, and in some cases contributed, visual images that were displayed during this dramatic reading. For another, the group created a visual image of a “body” based on I Corinthians 12:12-31 that was assembled while I preached. The stories of grace in another sermon also came from suggestions that group members had made. For another sermon, the PPG helped me imagine the transformation that might have taken place in a biblical character whom I then portrayed in a dramatic monologue.

As valuable as all of these contributions were, the importance of the group became even greater beginning with my final message of the second project year, in which the sermon was truly a group project. This sermon, preached on the weekend of the Martin Luther King holiday, consisted almost entirely of dramatic readings from some of King's sermons and speeches interspersed with scripture readings. The PPG also created a work of art that I unveiled bit by bit following each reading.

While I chose the readings from Dr. King and from the Bible, it was one of the PPG members who noted images of nighttime moving toward dawn in several of them and suggested using the clock as a central visual metaphor. Another member sketched some of his ideas into a design that would be a single work of art that could be revealed piece by piece as each of the excerpts was read. Yet another volunteered to oversee the construction of the clock itself.<sup>40</sup>

This deeper involvement continued during the third and final year of the project. In the first sermon for this year, preached the week immediately following the anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, I sought to explore the pain that the nation still carries from that event by means of weaving a simple chorus based on the lament found in Psalm 137 into my sermon. The questions and

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<sup>40</sup> See the illustration at the end of Appendix A, following the text of the sermon, for a view of the finished product.

skepticism that were shared when I first discussed with the PPG my idea of engaging in lament as a means of coming to terms with September 11 helped me immensely in honing and clarifying my work.

For the final project sermon, I created and presented a dramatic monologue based on the Parable of the Lost Sheep<sup>41</sup> in hopes of helping the congregation to experience a more celebrative tone than the lamentation from the previous sermon. The obvious split in the PPG between those who saw themselves as the lost sheep of the parable and those who identified much more with the ninety-nine had a major impact on the character that I created and portrayed. Perhaps the most important contribution of the group in this final year, however, came in their assistance in completely re-working the sermon evaluation process as described below.

### *Evaluating the Project Sermons*

Over the three years of the project, the way in which I sought feedback and the sort of response for which I looked changed dramatically. For the first year, the PPG helped me to create an evaluation form that was distributed randomly to people in the congregation prior to each project sermon. The members then collected these evaluations after the message. These responses were compiled by one of the group members, a psychology professor who is experienced at tabulating evaluative results.

I found these written responses most useful in helping me to reject some of the initial hypotheses I had as I began my preaching project. For example, I had initially thought that perhaps the age of the listeners might have been a major factor in determining how effective the art was in communicating the message. From the responses I received, however, it did not appear that this variable was statistically significant.

I had hypothesized that younger adults and youth might be more attracted to these messages since they are the most likely to be accustomed to multimedia presentations. By comparison, I had expected that older adults might be least responsive to such sermons since they would be more

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41 Matthew 18:10-14.

accustomed to a traditional approach. However, a statistical analysis of responses found no correlation between age and how favorable or unfavorable the responses were to any of the project sermons.

I had also theorized that the type of art upon which I drew might make a difference in how effectively the message was communicated. It seemed reasonable to me that music, for example, might be a more useful means of accomplishing a sermon purpose than visual art. I was also open to the possibility that precisely the opposite might be true. As I experimented with different art forms throughout the process, however, the particular creative art seemed not to be a factor in how positively people responded to the message.

A much more determining factor than either of these variables appeared to be the extent to which the art was viewed as an integral part of the sermon. Artistic presentations that were less connected to the spoken word seemed to be viewed less favorably than when the art was more intimately connected. When, for example, a readers theater was inserted into the sermon in a way that restated the scripture text, all of those surveyed found it an enhancement to the message. However, when a couple from the congregation sang a familiar chorus at various points in the message, six out of the twenty-one respondents reported that it was distracting for them. Likewise, the visual image that was assembled by others while I preached was at least partially distracting for six of the twenty respondents.

The evaluation questions we had asked in the first year were still more geared to logical reasoning than reporting any sort of experiential worship encounter. For the second year, then, I worked with the PPG to evaluate more thoroughly the emotional and intuitive impact of the sermons. We continued to make use of written questionnaires that were handed out prior to each project sermon and collected immediately following the service. The questions themselves, however, were re-worked in such a way as to more adequately measure the emotional reactions of the listeners. For example, rather than asking a cognitively oriented question such as “What do you think is the main point of the

sermon?” we provided respondents with a list of possible emotions and invited them to check any that they may have experienced during the sermon. We also asked them to name any images, ideas or words that came to them during the preaching in an attempt to record their intuitive responses.

These questions were at least somewhat successful in better gauging the full response of listeners to the sermons. Instead of simply telling me what the people understood the sermons to be about cognitively, these evaluation forms were better able to communicate what my listeners felt and experienced as I preached. In particular, I was pleased to find that many of those who responded reported feeling a sense of hope as a result of my preaching each of the three sermons.

The redesigned forms also provided greater opportunity for people to provide negative critiques. I found it very helpful to gain a better understanding of why some people did not find the creative arts useful. Indeed, there was a distinct minority who at times found them to be distracting. For example, one respondent reported being confused by a dramatic monologue and was “not tracking with the story.” Two respondents also found the clock image in the third sermon to be at least somewhat distracting to the message. While these represented a very small percentage of the total responses, the confirmation that the creative arts were not universally seen as useful was an important finding and a reminder that there are those who expect and genuinely appreciate the more traditional sermon format.

Ultimately, however, I found that even these re-worked written responses were less than adequate in getting a complete measure of my preaching. By the time the final project sermon of this year had been preached, nearly everyone in the congregation age thirteen and older had completed at least one questionnaire. Several had filled out more than one. Many of the responses were therefore starting to be quite repetitive. I was beginning to get the sense that a large number of people were writing what they thought I wanted to hear, or what they thought would impress my professors, rather than reporting their real experience.

In the third year of my project, therefore, I hoped to establish a process for feedback that

allowed parishioners to respond more fully to the messages—a process that engaged their entire beings rather than just their intellect. To that end, I worked with my PPG to create focus groups that would process the final two sermons of my preaching project. The PPG embraced this idea and carried it out far more completely than I had initially anticipated they might.

Various members volunteered to serve in different ways to make these focus groups happen, from providing lunch and child care for those who stayed after worship to participate, to facilitating the discussion and recording the responses. PPG members also suggested questions to guide the focus group process. I then met with the group facilitator prior to each focus group meeting in order to determine the specific questions to ask and the order in which to ask them.<sup>42</sup> The results of these hour-and-a-half long discussions immediately following both of my sermons for this year yielded far more feedback than the previous written surveys. The responses were also much more complete and useful than the brief comments on the written forms.

The focus group that convened following the final project sermon provided more criticism than the feedback that I had received from the congregation in response to any of my previous project sermons. This was no doubt partially due to the more open-ended format that allowed for more in-depth answers than the written forms used in previous years. Another factor, however, seems to be that the dramatic monologue proved to be confusing to some group members. Several individuals reported having a hard time distinguishing between me and the character I was trying to portray. In this instance, I may have integrated the arts so seamlessly that some missed the point where I stopped speaking and the character began.

### ***Changes in Sermon Style Throughout the Project***

In retrospect, I realized that my sermons from the first year of my project had not really achieved my goal. The sermons themselves had not changed significantly from the standard messages

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<sup>42</sup> These focus group discussion guides can be found in Appendix D.

I had been delivering for a number of years, relying largely on propositional statements, exhortation toward certain behaviors and scholarly explanations of scriptural texts.

Overall, I seemed to have done relatively little in this year to appeal to multiple intelligences beyond those typically engaged in preaching. The various creative elements added to the sermons may have broadened their appeal somewhat to those more inclined toward musical or spatial intelligence. The interaction of others in presenting the artistic elements may also have engaged the interpersonal intelligence somewhat more than a typical sermonic monologue. Overall, however, the sermons were still structured in such a way that they appealed largely to linguistic and logical intelligences. In short, I had not adequately integrated the arts into my preaching.

It was a humbling realization to recognize that, in most instances, the creative arts could have simply been removed without significantly altering anything in the message itself. The arts served largely as more elaborate illustrations to traditional sermons rather than as fully integrated aspects of the message. At times the two genres of the linguistic-logical sermon and the creative arts even seemed to be working against one another. As one of my professors noted in responding to a sermon that included the readers theater, the use of such arts “can be such a powerful signal that any speaking you do afterward has trouble getting through.”<sup>43</sup>

From these experiences, I was forced to reconsider what it really means to integrate creative arts into preaching. In doing so, I recognized that in order to *integrate* arts fully into sermons, such artistic elements must be genuinely *integral* to the entire sermon. In other words, for the arts to be truly integrated, removing the creative arts would render the rest of the sermon meaningless, or at the very least make it an entirely different sermon. Thus, true integration of creative arts into preaching requires an entirely different sermonic framework than the one that I had come to adopt over the course of my ministry. The sermons themselves had to be structured in a different manner, one that would not be

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43 Letter from Charles Cosgrove, October 5, 2006.

meaningful without the presence of the creative arts to convey the vital impact of the message.

In planning for my second year's project, then, I attempted to make some changes in the basic structure of the sermons themselves in order that the arts might become an integral part of each project sermon. In doing so, I also sought to appeal to a broader spectrum of intelligences. These changes in sermon structure were intended to engage the heart and soul, as well as the mind, to a greater extent than I had done previously. I sought to move away from sermons that were essentially still based on the traditional model of a sermon as a logical argument or cognitive instruction. Instead, I set out to draw more heavily upon stories, poetry, metaphors and other verbal images so that my words themselves might more fully engage the intuitive and emotive consciousnesses.

For this second year, the artistic elements used in my preaching were also more intentionally presented not only to serve as illustrative material for the spoken word as they had tended to do in my first year's sermons. I sought to incorporate the creative artistic works in such a way as to convey in themselves a sense of God's good news. The arts were meant to function neither as a full substitute for the spoken word, nor as a mere adjunct to the word, but as a meaningful companion. My intent was to truly integrate the arts into my preaching so that the words and the arts each reinforced and enhanced one another in such a way that the worshipers' entire beings were more fully engaged.

As I reflect on the sermons of this second year, then, I see a number of ways in which I was more successful in preaching to the multiple intelligences of the congregation than I had been previously. The form of the sermons themselves did shift so that the words played a distinctly different role—evoking and imagining rather than telling and persuading. This change in form helped to make the integration of arts more natural than it had been previously.

In singing a chorus repeatedly throughout my first sermon, I clearly appealed to the musical intelligence of the congregation. The personal stories I told also invited introspection in a manner that engaged the intrapersonal intelligence. In the dramatic monologue of the second sermon, I drew more

upon the interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences of the congregation as I invited more emotional interaction with the character. I also appealed more to spatial intelligence by using the entire space at the front of the sanctuary rather than positioning myself mostly behind the pulpit. The third sermon likewise engaged the congregation's spatial intelligence by means of the visual art work. I also appealed to musical intelligence through the use of King's speeches that were written with a definite cadence and were intended to be delivered with variation in tone.

Nevertheless, while the arts and words were generally more integrated than they had been in my first year, there were still times when the integration was incomplete. This was especially true in my first sermon of this year. After telling two stories of grace and singing the chorus a couple of times, I ended the message with a brief conclusion in which I had hoped to encourage the congregation to accept the grace of God that is so freely offered. At least some listeners, however, experienced this part of the sermon as a jarring contrast to the rest of it. The move from story and song to the more traditional mode of exhortation was simply too great of a transition for some of the listeners who perceived the final section more as a scolding than an invitation.

My advisor put it most harshly in declaring, "My impression in your preaching in the last third of the sermon was [that] you're really mad at me; and all you see in me is someone that is unappreciative of how undeservingly I get graced. And, damn it, I need to be appreciative! I need to repent!"<sup>44</sup> My intended effect of communicating a sense of grace, which seems to have been achieved in the storytelling and song, thus appears to have been negated at least to some extent by the final section that consisted of a more traditional sermonic form in which I resorted to *explaining* the moral rather than simply allowing the congregation to *experience* the grace for themselves. In other words, my failure to allow the arts to be an integral part of the sermon resulted in at least some people experiencing a vastly different sermon than the one I had intended to preach.

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<sup>44</sup> Taped sermon response from Paul S. Allen, September 2007.

In the third year of my project, then, I sought to gain a better understanding of what was happening internally to the listeners as they experienced the music, drama and visual art in the sermon combined with the creative use of words. To this end, I immersed myself more fully in Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. While I had looked at the theory and the various categories previously, I began to study them more in depth. I tried to craft my sermons in such a way that I much more consciously appealed to several of the various intelligences in each one of them.

My first sermon incorporated a familiar chorus repeated several times throughout the message in hopes that such an appeal to musical intelligence might serve as a means of helping the people get in touch with their own feelings about September 11. Both the focus group and the PPG confirmed that the music was quite effective in this appeal. One focus group member's comment expressed well my entire purpose in drawing upon creative arts: “[The music] helped me to pay attention. Often with sermons, it becomes something that happens up here [*pointing to head*]. As its droning on, you begin thinking 'Oh let's see, tomorrow I have to . . .' [*Laughter*]”<sup>45</sup> Such responses seem to indicate that I was at least making progress toward my stated goal of more seamlessly integrating the arts into my preaching, while also confirming that the arts can be an effective means of engaging various aspects of the listeners beyond their intellect.

Through the first-person drama of the second project sermon, I intended to appeal more to spatial and interpersonal intelligences. I thought that the parable genre would be one that lent itself well to such dramatization. The drama did clearly engage the emotive consciousness of the people. The focus group facilitator reported needing to find a couple of boxes of tissues to pass around during the session as several members became quite tearful. One participant affirmed the emotive nature of the drama in declaring, “I like it when I can get a sense of how God or Jesus is feeling toward us. The story . . . kind of makes me *feel* more of what the Love of God is, because it's something that I could

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45 Unidentified focus group participant, Manhattan Mennonite Church, Manhattan, KS, September 14, 2008. Recorded and transcribed by David MacFarland.

relate to.”<sup>46</sup> For at least this individual, I had clearly succeeded in moving my message beyond the intellectual realm and into other levels of consciousness.

Not all of the emotions that were evoked, however, were those which I had intended to elicit. While I had hoped for people to experience joy at a sense of being “found,” the predominant emotion reported in the focus group was one of “relief” when the lost was found. One group member even reported that, rather than rejoicing, the primary emotion that he or she experienced was “melancholy.”

Since the comments were passed on to me anonymously, I can't tell whether or not this was the same individual who commented that the experience of the sermon was “like exercise. It was good to hear, but it wasn't necessarily great to pep someone up. But it was very good FOR you.” Another group member concurred, “Yeah. Good medicine.”<sup>47</sup> Clearly, I did not fully achieve the celebratory tone that I had intended.

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46 Unidentified focus group participant, Manhattan Mennonite Church, Manhattan, KS, October 26, 2008. Recorded and transcribed by David MacFarland.

47 Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS: SOME LEARNINGS FROM THE PROJECT

In reviewing the three years of this project, there are some valuable insights that I have gained regarding the incorporation of creative arts into preaching. There are also areas that deserve further exploration and experimentation in the use of artistic expression in preaching as a means of engaging listeners at various levels of consciousness and modes of intelligence. Along the way, I discovered much about both the power and the pitfalls of preaching through the creative arts.

#### *Engaging Emotions, Intuition and Intelligences*

Both written and verbal responses have repeatedly affirmed that music, drama and visual art in the sermons have engaged people in the congregation in a manner that the spoken word has not always done. The first sermon of my final project year illustrates well this power of the creative arts—specifically, in this case, music.<sup>48</sup>

This message started from my own hunch that the violent reactions to the terrorist attacks of September 11 are really rooted in the lack of adequately dealing with feelings of grief and fear that we all felt on that tragic day. I believe that the nation rushed past these emotions into the mode of trying to “fix” the problem by destroying the terrorists, even using the 9/11 events to justify a war with a nation (Iraq) that had nothing to do with the attacks. An important step in seeking peace and resolution, therefore, is recognizing and dealing with these emotions. While neither a sermon nor the worship service in general can be a “therapy session” where parishioners work through such emotions in full, I do believe that worship and preaching can set a therapeutic tone that can, in turn, encourage the worshipers to begin seeking resolution for themselves.

In attempting to address the congregation at such an emotional level, I turned first to the psalms

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix B for the text of this sermon.

where many emotions are expressed in the various laments and praises. I settled on Psalm 137 as a text that was also written in a time of great national tragedy, namely the Babylonian Exile. Once again, I determined that such a poetic text would have more power to evoke deep-seated memories and emotions than would a logical argument or detailed analysis of the stages of grief.

The text of this psalm has also been set to a variety of contemporary musical settings, thus providing me with the opportunity to further engage the emotive consciousness of my listeners. Since I had already determined that a logical/rational approach was inadequate in addressing the deeply held grief and anger over the terrorist attacks, I turned to singing as a means of appealing to the congregation's musical intelligence in order to engage them on emotive and intuitive levels.

The song that I chose to sing throughout the message is a fairly simple chorus based on Psalm 137. The traditional melody is found in our hymnal, and is one with which at least some of my parishioners would have been familiar. The song also is written to be sung in a round. I therefore arranged for other individuals in the congregation to join in the singing on the second and third time that I sang the chorus. I hoped that adding these voices to sing the different parts in a round would also help to convey a sense of the interconnectedness of various aspects of consciousness that need to work together in responding to God's call.

It was clear to me, however, that Psalm 137 itself was not adequate to the task that I had laid out for myself. For while it does express a deep sense of grief, it also concludes with a heartfelt desire for vengeance. While giving voice to deeply felt emotions, the psalmist is not yet the positive example of one who has fully worked through one's grief.

I turned, therefore, to Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. His words, too, are based on metaphor rather than simple logic. Here we find someone also expressing a range of emotions, but ultimately concluding with a desire for reconciliation rather than revenge. As Christians, our response to those who wrong us should be modeled after Jesus' desire to "gather your children together as a hen gathers

her brood under her wings”<sup>49</sup> as opposed to the psalmist's wish to “take your little ones and dash them against the rock!”<sup>50</sup>

The focus group that met following the sermon affirmed that the pairing of these two scripture texts, combined with the repeated use of the chorus, was an effective approach. As one participant put it, “Right at the beginning of the message, at the beginning of the song, I felt that exile. That picture of people being tossed into exile—out of their homes, into the desert.”<sup>51</sup> In general, the group's comments indicated that the music was especially helpful in evoking feelings of sorrow. When asked what other images, ideas or words came to mind, the most prominent feeling reported was anger. The music, however, seemed to help re-direct that anger into mourning and sadness, which is precisely what I hoped to accomplish in the sermon.

The tactic of having other voices join in the singing also seemed to be effective in giving a greater sense of hope. One focus group participant understood that the addition of voices in the round “was role-modeling a response. And so when we have this pain, this anger . . . we CAN act alone, we can act aloud with each other, we can act and interpret it with each other—and we’re still doing something individually, but we’re also making a common song.”<sup>52</sup>

I have used a similar approach in several other sermons where I have sung a repeated refrain at various points throughout the message. In most of those cases, a few more voices joined in the singing each time I repeated the chorus, so that by the final rendition a majority of the congregation was singing along. All of this happened without any explicit encouragement or invitation by me. The listeners had moved voluntarily from passive observers to active participants. They had engaged deeply enough in the message that the sermon became an interactive experience.

Although the growing chorus in this particular message was more deliberately staged as I

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49 Luke 13:34 (NRSV)

50 Psalm 137:9 (NRSV)

51 Unidentified focus group participant, September 14, 2008.

52 Ibid.

recruited others in the congregation beforehand to join in the round, the effect of the added voices was similar in suggesting greater participation by the congregation in the message. Indeed, at least one focus group participant reported hearing others around her or him who also joined in the singing. As one of my professors who responded to this sermon noted, “The hymn works well, bringing in more voices as you move along. That is what you hope for in a sermon. . . . As the preacher speaks, people begin to speak too until the sermon reaches the point of deep connection. In some congregations—especially African-American that moment is vocalized”<sup>53</sup> While such vocal interaction may be common in many African-American traditions, it is quite rare in the predominantly white Mennonite church in North America that my congregation represents. The spontaneous reaction of joining in the singing of the preacher is thus evidence of engagement with and by the congregation at a level that has not traditionally been achieved.

### *Messages and Meaning*

Perhaps the greatest strength—and paradoxically the greatest weakness—that I have found in the incorporation of creative arts into preaching is the polyvalent nature of the meanings found in art itself. The reactions to the final sermon in my preaching project illustrates this point well.<sup>54</sup>

There were decidedly mixed reactions to this sermon. Some were clearly moved by it, while others were confused. While these various reactions no doubt had something to do with the nature of the drama and the way in which I presented it, the response may also say something about the makeup of the focus group, or perhaps even the congregation as a whole.

In keeping with my thesis goal of preaching to multiple intelligences, the focus group completed a simple survey to gauge the types of intelligence represented among them.<sup>55</sup> I was

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53 Charles Rice, e-mail response to the videotaped sermon, received October 8, 2008.

54 See Appendix C for the text of this sermon.

55 The survey I used was a slightly modified form of the one posted by Cynthia Klymkiw on the web site of Parkdale Public School of Toronto, Ontario. The original form was accessed on September 3, 2008 at <http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/parkdaleps/Pathfinder/miinteractivesurveck.htm> It should perhaps be noted that Howard Gardner himself states that there is no test for multiple intelligences that he personally endorses (*Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*, 63).

surprised to note that the two modes of intelligence which I had hoped to address most directly through use of a first person dramatic monologue—spatial intelligence and interpersonal intelligence—were in fact the two areas in which the focus group as a whole scored lowest.

The interpersonal intelligence score in particular was significantly lower than in the first focus group. Two of the male participants scored exceptionally low in this area.<sup>56</sup> Again, because of the anonymous nature of both the multiple intelligence survey and the focus group comments, it is impossible to match individual comments with persons who scored high or low in particular areas. I therefore cannot determine whether those who scored low in this area were necessarily the same persons who had more difficulty relating to the sermon.

In contrast, by far the highest score in both groups was in the area of intrapersonal intelligence.<sup>57</sup> This would seem to indicate that group members for this sermon were generally much more predisposed toward quiet introspection than toward outward bursts of joyful celebration. I am still uncertain, however, if the fact that intrapersonal intelligence scores were so much higher than any other scores for both groups is an accurate reflection of the fact that this congregation is unusually high in such intelligence or if it is perhaps a flaw in the survey instrument that consistently overrates this mode. It may also be that the very nature of the worship service itself and/or merely taking the survey in a church building may predispose one toward more positive responses to the statements designed to measure intrapersonal intelligence such as “I am keenly aware of my moral beliefs” or “Social justice issues concern me.”

In any case, even those who did react quite emotionally to this sermon tended not to reflect the celebratory, joyous tone that I had intended to achieve. I take the major portion of blame for this lack of joyful response. The drama that I created and presented did not ultimately show my own character

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<sup>56</sup> On a scale from 0 to 50, these individuals scored 9 and 11, respectively. The average interpersonal intelligence score for the group as a whole was 24.8

<sup>57</sup> On the scale from 0 to 50, the two focus groups averaged 40.9 and 41.2, respectively. No other intelligences averaged higher than 36.5 in either group.

rejoicing in the manner that I had originally intended. If I were to re-do this particular sermon, I would no doubt change the story significantly in order to portray a more jubilant celebration.

Having said this, the lack of joyful response among the focus group may also be due in part to the varying life experiences which the group members brought to the sermon. One member, for example, told of a former classmate who was a “lost sheep” that never was “found.” Instead, he was killed in a shootout with police after escaping from prison, taking the lives of others in the process. This is the individual who understandably reported feeling “melancholy” at the end of the sermon.

In contrast, another group member recalled a time from her<sup>58</sup> youth when she had shoplifted an item from a store while on vacation. When she was caught and confessed, her father responded not with anger and punishment, but by taking communion with her in the hotel room. She was able therefore to identify very strongly with the character in the monologue who is “found” even when he never really realized that he was “lost.” This person became so emotional in her response that she was unable to ultimately describe the feelings evoked by the message. It was at this point in the focus group session that the recorder simply noted, “Boxes of tissues were distributed. One person said, ‘There should be Kleenex in every pew.’”<sup>59</sup>

The widely different reactions of these two persons illustrates well both the risk and the reward of incorporating creative arts into preaching. In both cases, the artistic nature of the dramatic monologue clearly engaged the intuitive consciousness of the person, calling to mind significant events from their past. Yet the emotive nature of that memory was quite different for these two. It is perhaps the very nature of art that there is an open-endedness to the media that allows for such varying interpretations and experiences by different viewers.

Jesus himself allowed for such variance as he appropriated into his own preaching the artistic

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58 Although group participants were not identified in any way in the transcript I received, including gender, I feel comfortable in referring to this person as “she” given that it is a story that I have heard a female member of the congregation share publicly on previous occasions.

59 Unidentified focus group participant, October 26, 2008.

form of storytelling that we have come to know as the parable. Rather than fully explaining what he meant in cognitive or rational terms, he often simply told the story and concluded with the exhortation, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”<sup>60</sup> The ultimate interpretation and application of the story was thus left to the hearers.

There were clearly times when his audience did not understand what he was saying, such as the various occasions when the disciples asked for an explanation.<sup>61</sup> At other times, it is just as clear that many understood at least the general nature of the parable, such as when the chief priests and Pharisees recognized themselves as the villains in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants and wanted to have Jesus arrested.<sup>62</sup> In each of these cases, Jesus demonstrated his willingness to be misunderstood in exchange for allowing the hearer to be led to her or his own conclusion by the Holy Spirit.

It is perhaps this very openness to a variety of understandings that makes the parables of Jesus so popular nearly twenty centuries after he first told them. John Donohue notes that

The parable is a question waiting for an answer, an invitation waiting for a response. It does not really 'exist' or function until it is freely appropriated. . . . Jesus chose a form of discourse that appealed to human freedom and risked himself with human freedom. . . . The language and life of Jesus was an appeal to a free response and did not compromise freedom for the sake of adherence or commitment.<sup>63</sup>

The preacher, according to Donohue, must also allow his or her audience the same sort of freedom exhibited by Jesus himself. We preachers must resist the temptation to sum up a parable in a simple moral application, allowing instead for the polyvalent possibilities of meaning to remain intact. “Rather than presenting the parables with immediate applications, it might be better for preachers and readers to leave the parable open-ended and ambiguous. The risk of freedom must be taken by those who preach and by those who hear the parables.”<sup>64</sup>

What Donohue says about the parable can be expanded to include any of the variety of creative

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60 Some examples are found in Matthew 13:43, Mark 4:9 and Luke 8:8.

61 Matthew 13:36, 15:15 and Mark 4:10.

62 Matthew 21:45-46.

63 John R. Donohue, S.J., *The Gospel in Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 19.

64 Donohue, 19-20.

arts in which I have engaged throughout my project. I am learning as a preacher myself to give up control of how the congregation responds to any given sermon. I am coming to understand that my task is to be faithful to both the message and tone of the scriptures—not necessarily to explain the text or tell others what they should or must do in response to the text. I am seeking to give control to God's Spirit to appropriate the text within the congregation in a way that is both faithful and meaningful without explicitly outlining the nature of that appropriation.

This is a risky endeavor indeed, both for me as a preacher and for my congregation. Artistic images by themselves can be quite ambiguous. Many times, such ambiguity may be welcome. Visual images can remain open to various levels of interpretation. They invite the listeners or observers to become actively involved in creating and discovering meaning for themselves. This process of discovery may, in fact, be quashed by too many words from the preacher who tries to explain precise meanings that are too constricting.

On the other hand, the use of creative arts alone may not always be enough to convey a meaningful message of any kind to many people. As Friesen notes, “When we experience aesthetic delight, we can interpret that experience theologically or simply understand it as a rich aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experiences do not of themselves produce a religious interpretation of reality.”<sup>65</sup>

Ultimately, then, choosing the proper pairing of word and art is a crucial aspect of integrating the creative arts into preaching. Richard Jensen sums it up well:

People “see” things differently through an image. In fact, the image often communicates when the word does not, communicating to some people far better than words. But there is a problem here as well. The image can become so diffuse in meaning that it means literally anything or nothing, or its meaning to a given individual can move far beyond the bounds of the church’s teaching. So, images *need* words to give them meaning, boundary and definition.<sup>66</sup>

If one is not careful, there is also always the danger that the art itself will simply overpower the

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65 Friesen, 175.

66 Richard A. Jensen, *Envisioning the Word: The Use of Visual Images in Preaching*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 83-84.(emphasis in original)

spoken word in such a way that the preacher's intent is subverted. One professor who responded to a sermon from my first project year called to mind the discovery by politicians that images are often more powerful than words: "Put up a huge American flag behind a speaking candidate and people associate their positive feelings about the flag with that candidate."<sup>67</sup> The reverse, of course, can also be true. An image with negative or ambivalent connotations can work against the message that the preacher intends to convey.

Such subversion may be particularly prone to happen with the use of film. Bringing clips of multi-million dollar, slickly produced movies into the typical sanctuary runs a tremendous risk of upstaging the preacher and what he or she intends to convey. Few of us, skilled as we may be, are in the position to compete for attention with Hollywood. As Yoder, Kropf and Slough note, "When handled poorly, a film clip or other multimedia presentation is intrusive, hijacking the real-time experience of the congregation with the urgency and intensity characteristic of film."<sup>68</sup>

There are certainly those who welcome the openness and the freedom to find the meaning of the scripture for themselves that various artistic expressions offer. There are others, however, who are quite uncomfortable—perhaps even threatened—by the lack of certainty or direct application that the arts give. This is, no doubt, due in part to the differing intelligences that different individuals bring.

### ***Collaboration and Creativity***

In order to complete this project successfully, I needed to rely quite heavily on my Parish Project Group. The importance of collaborative efforts in the integration of arts into preaching can hardly be overstated. I simply could not have accomplished what I did throughout this project without the faithful support and creative input of my PPG. Their participation was necessary not only in implementing the creative aspects of the messages and evaluating their impact on the congregation, but also in shaping the messages themselves. The process of engaging with this group has taken much of

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67 Cosgrove letter.

68 Yoder, Kropf and Slough, 179.

my sermon preparation out of my study lined with books and placed it more deeply within the experience of the congregation. This in itself has helped me to move from preaching primarily to the mind to preaching that more fully engages heart, soul and strength as well.

The process was for me a valuable reaffirmation of a key Mennonite belief in the importance of the community of believers as the primary setting for biblical interpretation and Christian discipleship. Yoder, Kropf and Slough observe that “when worship is not a collaborative ministry, the body of Christ suffers. We become deformed without the creative insights, unique biblical and theological perspectives, and diverse life experiences of the members of the body.”<sup>69</sup> While much has been done in recent years to encourage such collaboration in various parts of planning and presenting the worship service, the sermon itself has tended to remain the sole domain of the pastor.

In addition to stimulating my personal creativity, the collaborative process also has had the benefit of getting more people to have a very personal interest in the sermon. The PPG members clearly had a stake in the preaching given their involvement in shaping it. Thus, they reported being more attentive to the message and had a better understanding of the scripture text than they have had in the past.

They also took criticism of these sermons by other members of the congregation, professors and my advisor quite personally at times. In the meetings when we reviewed critiques from various respondents, I often found several PPG members becoming much more defensive than I was as the preacher in response to constructive criticisms. Indeed, there appeared to be a strong correlation between how involved the PPG was in shaping the sermons and how successful I was in integrating creative arts into the message and engaging the congregation at multiple levels.

From these experiences, I have had to re-think the entire role of the preacher in shaping and presenting the sermon. When seeking to incorporate creative arts into preaching, the preacher needs to

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69 Yoder, Kropf and Slough, 15.

view himself or herself not only as writer or performer, but also as editor and/or director. A major task that I needed to perform in many of these sermons was one of coordinating the creative efforts of various people to see that a central message and focus was maintained.

Such a directorial role was perhaps most apparent in the third sermon I preached in the second year of my project in which I read excerpts from the works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>70</sup> Other than a brief introduction to explain what I was doing, I actually *wrote* none of this sermon. Indeed, there were times when I questioned whether or not it could truly be called “my” sermon.

I read the words of Dr. King. The visual image that illuminated the message was conceived and produced by someone other than me. The manner in which the image was presented was also developed by another person. I played only a supportive role in the actual construction of the central image. Even the order in which the excerpts of King's speeches and sermons were read was suggested by a member of my PPG.

Ultimately, however, the presentation was viewed as *my* sermon (as opposed to my reading of someone else's sermon) both by the congregation as a whole and by the PPG members who were intimately involved in the creative artistic components of the message. I was the one who chose the readings that were used, both the excerpts from Dr. King and the scripture passages. I was the one who recruited the scripture readers, which is a departure from the norm in a congregation where the lay worship leader of the morning generally does this task. I was also the one who presented the words of King in a dramatic reading and “unveiled” the artistic image. I advised and ultimately approved all the decisions made regarding the visual art and sound effects presented in the message. It was “my” sermon not because I *wrote* it, but because I *directed* the various collaborative efforts to insure that a cohesive and meaningful message of good news was ultimately delivered to the congregation.

Through this process, I was able to take words that were not originally my own—that were, in

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<sup>70</sup> The full text of this sermon and the accompanying artistic image can be found in Appendix A.

fact, written in a time that is not in the living memory of most of my parishioners—and deliver them in such a way that they were quite relevant to those present. In a sense, this task of making old words relevant to a present situation is what we as preachers do on a regular basis.

The words that I spoke in this message were only forty to fifty years removed from the current context, as opposed to the thousands of years that separate us from scripture. Still, I needed to bridge a chronological and cultural gap to make them meaningful for my twenty-first century, predominantly white audience. The use of creative arts produced in a collaborative effort proved to be very effective in bridging that gap. While the level of creativity and collaboration that we engaged in for this sermon is impossible to maintain on a weekly basis, there may be much to gain from engaging in it on a somewhat regular basis.

This joint creative approach worked in several sermons because the group members themselves were also able to recognize that not all their ideas and contributions would ultimately make it into the pulpit on Sunday morning. They needed to be willing to offer suggestions without taking offense when some of what they considered their best ideas were not included in the final sermon. I likewise discovered that I must not be so fearful of hurting group members' feelings that I failed to edit out ideas and suggestions that did not fit with the overall sermon purpose.

Indeed, the use of arts without such collaborative effort can easily become counterproductive. Yoder, Kropf and Slough warn against arts being used in worship in such a way that the artists become “specialists” or “performers,” with the role of worshipers being reduced to passive spectators.<sup>71</sup> This result would run entirely counter to my intentions in drawing upon the creative arts in the first place as it would lessen, rather than enhance, the sense of an interactive experience with God in worship. The creative arts were indeed most effective in engaging the listeners in new ways when they were conceived and created through a collaborative effort.

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71 Yoder, Kropf and Slough, 182.

As my formal preaching project has concluded, I now face the challenge of continuing to implement my learnings in my ongoing preaching ministry without the support of the Parish Project Group that was so crucial to this project's success. I must find new ways to tap into the creativity of my parishioners and integrate the arts into my sermons. I will need to look for other means of collaborating with persons who can assist me in the creative process.

At this point, I am still considering several possible options that I hope to pursue in the near future in order to accomplish this task. I am hopeful that these options might also be adaptable to preachers in a variety of settings where the formal structure of the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program is not present.

One such option would be to create occasional or seasonal PPG's. Under this design, a group would be formed to work with the preacher for a given period of time, such as Lent, Advent or a given month or two in Ordinary Time. During this period of time, the group would attempt to find ways to incorporate the arts into the preaching on a regular basis. While it may not be possible, or even advisable, to weave creative elements into every message over this time, attention would be given to texts on at least a few of the Sundays that would lend themselves well to artistic expression.

Another possibility might be to designate several given Sundays throughout the year as "Arts Sundays." These days, to be selected well in advance, would provide an opportunity for an *ad hoc* group to work with the preacher to create an artistic expression to enhance the sermon.

Under either of these options, a group similar to the PPG would be formed to work with the preacher on a more limited basis. Such groups could be useful in developing the artistic elements to be presented in the preaching. It is unlikely, however, that they would be able to engage in the same sort of in-depth evaluation done by the PPG with whom I worked over an extended period of time for my project.

Another, entirely different, option that might also achieve the goal of creative collaboration

could be an attempt to engage the entire congregation in the creative process. In this scenario, I would do some initial reflection on the biblical texts for a sermon or series of sermons. I would then email everyone in the congregation some of these initial thoughts a couple of weeks prior to the sermon and invite responses. I would especially encourage people to share stories, images or songs that might come to mind. Such responses could then become the basis for creative elements that could be incorporated into the preaching. Those who offer useful ideas may also be invited to participate in the formation of the message much as the PPG did throughout my project.

It remains to be seen which, if any, of these potential options might prove useful in continuing to implement the learnings from this project. In the end, however, it seems clear that the use of creative arts can be one valuable means of appealing to intelligences that may not be engaged by the traditional sermonic approach. Yet such arts should not and cannot entirely take the place of well-reasoned and spoken words. Nor will a few artistic expressions tossed into traditional sermons based primarily on reason and logic be very effective in fully engaging the congregation.

Rather, the preacher who hopes to speak to the entire beings of her or his listeners must take care to integrate the creative use of words through story, metaphor and poetry with various dramatic, visual and musical arts, all without losing the sense of rational thought that holds it all together. Ultimately, it is a healthy mix of both artistic and traditional sermonic approaches that can most completely engage the members of the congregation as the whole beings that they have been created to be—heart, mind, soul and strength; cognitive, emotive and intuitive consciousness; and the unique mix of the various multiple intelligences that every individual possesses.

## APPENDIX A

### **Towards a New Dawn** A Sermon Preached on January 20, 2008

This weekend, our nation celebrates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He is remembered as a civil rights leader, a crusader for justice and an American hero. Dr. King was indeed all that. But first and foremost he was a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther King never held—or even sought—political office. He never appeared in films or hosted his own talk show. He was a preacher—a prophetic voice calling God's people to be faithful to their calling as followers of Christ. And while his most famous speech took place before tens of thousands of people on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, most of the time he appeared before a few hundred people standing behind a pulpit.

So this morning we honor his legacy by hearing from some of Dr. King's words from various lesser-known works of his that give us a broader picture of what his ministry was all about. You'll find the names of these speeches, sermons and writings in your bulletin this morning, along with the dates and places when they were delivered. In these excerpts, he touches not only issues of civil rights and racism, but also on matters of war and peace, of life and death, of poverty and abundance, of faith, hope and—above all—love.

These words were written forty or even fifty years ago; and perhaps some of the language will sound a bit dated. However, they contain timeless truths that are just as relevant to us today as when they were first spoken. When, for example, Dr. King speaks of the war in Vietnam exactly one year before his assassination, he could just as well be speaking about Iraq today. Or when he comforts the families of the 11- and 14-year-old girls killed in a church bombing in Birmingham, his words are applicable to any of us who have ever lost a loved one. And when he talks about “Rediscovering Lost Values” when he is a mere 25 years old, he speaks with wisdom that transcends the generations.

I invite you, then, to experience these words of scripture and of Martin Luther King, Jr. as we recognize the darkness of the world in which we live and look forward towards a new dawn. We begin, then, with the “Knock at Midnight.”

### **A Knock at Midnight** Published in *Strength to Love* in 1963

Reader: Luke 11:5-6

It is midnight in the parable; it is also midnight in our world, and the darkness is so deep that we can hardly see which way to turn. . . . In the terrible midnight of war men have knocked on the door of the church to ask for the bread of peace, but the church has often disappointed them. What more pathetically reveals the irrelevancy of the church in present-day world affairs than its witness regarding war? In a world gone mad with arms buildups, chauvinistic passions, and imperialistic exploitation, the church has either endorsed these activities or remained appallingly silent. During the last two world wars, national churches even functioned as the ready lackeys of the state, sprinkling holy water upon the battleships and joining the mighty armies in singing, "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition." A

weary world, pleading desperately for peace, has often found the church morally sanctioning war.

And those who have gone to the church to seek the bread of economic justice have been left in the frustrating midnight of economic privation. In many instances the church has so aligned itself with the privileged classes and so defended the status quo that it has been unwilling to answer the knock at midnight. . . . Many continue to knock on the door of the church at midnight, even after the church has so bitterly disappointed them, because they know the bread of life is there. The church today is challenged to proclaim God's Son, Jesus Christ, to be the hope of men in all of their complex personal and social problems.

Midnight is a confusing hour when it is difficult to be faithful. The most inspiring word that the church must speak is that no midnight long remains. The weary traveller by midnight who asks for bread is really seeking the dawn. Our eternal message of hope is that dawn will come. . . . Faith in the dawn arises from the faith that God is good and just. When one believes this, he knows that the contradictions of life are neither final nor ultimate. He can walk through the dark night with the radiant conviction that all things work together for good for those that love God. Even the most starless midnight may herald the dawn of some great fulfillment.

*(Chimes sound. "Clock" is advanced to reveal a portion of the painting)\**

### **Beyond Vietnam**

delivered to the Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam  
4 April 1967, Riverside Church, New York

Reader: 2 Corinthians 5:14-20

I cannot forget that the Nobel Peace Prize was also a commission . . . to work harder than I had ever worked before for the brotherhood of man. . . . But even if it were not present, I would yet have to live with the meaning of my commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. To me, the relationship of this ministry to the making of peace is so obvious that I sometimes marvel at those who ask me why I am speaking against the war. Could it be that they do not know that the Good News was meant for all men—for communist and capitalist, for their children and ours? . . . Have they forgotten that my ministry is in obedience to the one who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them? . . .

Because I believe that the Father is deeply concerned, especially for His suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come tonight to speak for them. This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions. We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls "enemy." . . .

This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard? Will our message be that the forces of American life militate against their arrival as full men, and we send our deepest regrets? Or will there be another message—of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to their cause, whatever the cost? The choice is ours. . . .

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\* See clock image on page 51.

And if we will only make the right choice, we will be able to transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of peace. If we will make the right choice, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. If we will but make the right choice, we will be able to speed up the day, all over America and all over the world, when justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

*(Chimes sound. "Clock" is advanced to reveal a portion of the painting)*

### **Eulogy for the Young Victims of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing,**

delivered at Sixth Avenue Baptist Church

18 September 1963, Birmingham, Ala.

Reader: Romans 8:18-28

Death comes to every individual. There is an amazing democracy about death. It is not aristocracy for some of the people, but a democracy for all of the people. Kings die and beggars die; rich men and poor men die; old people die and young people die. Death comes to the innocent and it comes to the guilty. Death is the irreducible common denominator of all men.

I hope you can find some consolation from Christianity's affirmation that death is not the end. Death is not a period that ends the great sentence of life, but a comma that punctuates it to more lofty significance. Death is not a blind alley that leads the human race into a state of nothingness, but an open door which leads man into life eternal. Let this daring faith, this great invincible surmise, be your sustaining power during these trying days.

Now I say to you in conclusion, life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons, life has the soothing warmth of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters. And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him, and that God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.

And so today, you do not walk alone. You gave to this world wonderful children. They didn't live long lives, but they lived meaningful lives. Their lives were distressingly small in quantity, but glowingly large in quality. . . . Shakespeare had Horatio to say some beautiful words as he stood over the dead body of Hamlet. And today, as I stand over the remains of these beautiful, darling girls, I paraphrase the words of Shakespeare: Good night, sweet princesses. Good night, those who symbolize a new day. And may the flight of angels take thee to thy eternal rest. God bless you.

*(Chimes sound. "Clock" is advanced to reveal a portion of the painting)*

### **Rediscovering Lost Values**

28 February 1954, *Delivered at Second Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan*

Reader: Luke 2:41-51

I think, my friends, that . . . in America . . . we have unconsciously left God behind. Now, we haven't consciously done it; we have unconsciously done it. You . . . remember the text said that Jesus' parents went a whole day's journey not knowing that he wasn't with them. They didn't consciously leave him behind. It was unconscious . . . You see, we didn't grow up and say, "Now, goodbye God, we're going to leave you now." The materialism in America has been an unconscious thing. . . . We didn't mean to do it. We just became so involved in getting our big bank accounts that we unconsciously forgot about God . . . . And that is the danger confronting us, my friends: that in a nation as ours . . . where we have so many conveniences and luxuries and all of that, there is the danger that we will unconsciously forget about God.

As a young man with most of my life ahead of me, I decided early to give my life to something eternal and absolute. Not to these little gods that are here today and gone tomorrow, but to God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. . . . Not in the god that can give us a few Cadillac cars and Buick convertibles, as nice as they are, that are in style today and out of style three years from now, but the God who threw up the stars to bedeck the heavens like swinging lanterns of eternity. Not in the god that can throw up a few skyscraping buildings, but the God who threw up the gigantic mountains, kissing the sky, as if to bathe their peaks in the lofty blues. Not in the god that can give us a few televisions and radios, but the God who threw up that great cosmic light that gets up early in the morning in the eastern horizon, who paints its technicolor across the blue—something that man could never make.

I'm not going to put my ultimate faith in the little gods that can be destroyed in an atomic age, but the God who has been our help in ages past, and our hope for years to come. . . . That's the God that I'm putting my ultimate faith in. That's the God that I call upon you to worship this morning.

*(Chimes sound. "Clock" is advanced to reveal a portion of the painting)*

### **A Look to the Future**

Address Delivered at Highlander Folk Schools

25th Anniversary Meeting, 2 September 1957, Monteagle, Tenn.

Reader: Matthew 5:43-48

Now in a sense all of us must live the well adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic . . . personalities. But there are some things in our social system to which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I suggest that you too ought to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of mob-rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating method of physical violence. I call upon you to be maladjusted. Well you see it may be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted.

The challenge to you this morning as I leave you, is to be maladjusted -- as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day, could cry out in terms that echo across the centuries, let judgement run down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream;" as maladjusted

as Lincoln, who had the vision to see that this nation could not survive half slave and half free; . . . Yes, as maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth who dared to dream a dream of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men. He looked at men amid the intricate and fascinating military machinery of the Roman Empire. And could say to them, "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword." Jesus who could look at men in the midst of their tendencies for tragic hate and say to them, "Love thy enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that despitefully use you." The world is in desperate need of such maladjustment. Through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

*(Chimes sound. "Clock" is advanced to reveal the final portion of the painting)*



## APPENDIX B

### **The Sacred Space of Grief**

A Sermon based on Psalm 137 and Luke 13:31-35

Preached on September 14, 2008

Sung: *By the waters, the waters of Babylon,  
we sat down and wept, and wept for thee Zion.  
We remember thee, remember thee, remember thee, Zion.*

It was a time of great national tragedy. The people of Judah had been utterly defeated by the mighty Babylonian Empire. Their homeland lay in complete ruins. Their king—the descendant of David—had been removed from the throne, forced to witness the execution of his own sons, then blinded and carried off into exile in chains. Many of the nation's leading citizens went with him, leaving behind only the poorest residents to try to eke out a living in the wake of all the devastation. Those who had once ruled were reduced to serving a foreign king in a distant land.

The capital city of Jerusalem was totally destroyed. The massive walls intended to protect it from invasion were torn down. The palace was demolished. And on Mount Zion in the midst of the city, the temple of the Lord was ransacked—its valuables carried off to Babylon. Whatever was left was burned to the ground. Virtually everything that had defined the Jewish nation as a unique and independent entity was gone.

And then, adding insult to injury, those who had been carried away into exile were mocked by their captors: “Where is your god now? Why don't you sing to him and see if he'll save you? How about one of those happy songs you used to sing in your temple? Yeah, sing us one of the songs of Zion!”(v. 3)

But the psalmist tells us that the people were unable to sing. Their grief was so great that they could not bring themselves to lift their voices in praise to God. They could do nothing but lament: “By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. . . . How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?”(v. 1,2,4) How, indeed? How could they go on as if everything were normal when “normal” no longer existed?

This past week the nation marked the seventh anniversary of our own great national tragedy. On September 11, 2001 we were all shocked and deeply saddened by the tragic destruction and loss of life in the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and in Pennsylvania. Many of us spent that day glued to the TV and radio, hardly believing that such a horrendous thing could really be happening here in the United States. It was the worst attack in American history. The heartbreaking images of that day are forever burned into our consciousness: planes flying directly into the twin towers; the towers themselves smoldering and ultimately crashing down; crowds streaming out of Manhattan on foot; a firefighter carrying away a flag-draped victim.

Even the Pentagon—the “wall” that was supposed to protect the nation against attack—was breached. A gaping hole was blasted in the headquarters of the most powerful military the world has ever known. The central command of our supposedly invincible security forces was proven to be

vulnerable. And all the weapons, all the firepower, all the soldiers and sailors and airmen, all the hundreds of billions of tax dollars spent every year on so-called “defense” were powerless in the face of a handful of men armed with nothing more than box cutters that they carried on board a few commercial flights.

Now, the tragedy of 9/11—as awful as it was—was not the same as the Babylonian Exile. Unlike the Israelites, we were not driven from our land to a foreign country. Our government was not overthrown. The basic institutions of our society did not stop functioning. The United States did not cease to exist.

Yet we, too, witnessed the destruction of great national icons as the most visible symbols of our nation's enormous military might and tremendous economic power went up in flames. We, too, were heartbroken over the deaths of fellow citizens as nearly 3000 people lost their lives on that day. We, too, were shocked and disoriented, challenged to consider what our nation was really all about. And we, too, did not know how to respond. We, too, sat down and wept.

*Sung: By the waters, the waters of Babylon,  
we sat down and wept, and wept for thee Zion.  
We remember thee, remember thee, remember thee, Zion.*

In the midst of the trauma of exile, the psalmist gives voice to the grief and heartbreak of those who have been taken from their homes and seen their nation destroyed. There is more in this psalm, however, than just an outpouring of sorrow. The writer begins in lament. But by the end of the psalm, the tone has changed dramatically.

When Psalm 137 is read in public, or its words are set to music, the quotation almost always ends with the sixth verse as the psalmist vows to never forget his beloved Jerusalem. But then, starting in verse 7, he goes on to express rage against those who have perpetrated these terrible things against his people. He calls upon the Lord to remember the despicable actions of Judah's neighbors, the Edomites, who cheered on the Babylonians, calling out “Tear it down! Down to its foundations!”(v. 7)

Then the passage turns downright vengeful as the psalmist calls Babylon the “devastator” and declares, “Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us!”(v. 8) The statement comes as something of a surprise to those of us who are accustomed to thinking of God as unendingly forgiving and always loving. Our surprise turns to shock and even revulsion as the writer concludes by stating, “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!”(v. 9)

Those are troubling words. It's bad enough that the psalmist seems to seek retribution against his enemies. But this last verse goes much further. Not only are Judah's enemies condemned, but their children are targeted as well. The psalmist appears to be almost gleeful at the thought of someone grabbing Babylonian infants and literally bashing their brains out. To be sure, this was not a particularly unusual tactic in ancient warfare. Children—especially the children of the royal family—were considered fair game. For as long as they lived, they were a threat—a figure for the people to rally around if they wanted to reestablish themselves against those who had defeated them.

To our modern sensibilities, however, the intentional killing of children is unconscionable. It's not only those of us who adopt a pacifist ethic who find such action unacceptable. Those who espouse

a just war position—which represents the overwhelming majority of Christians—would similarly condemn it.

Indeed, one doesn't have to be Christian or religious in any way to be deeply troubled by the thought of soldiers purposely massacring babies. Anyone who ordered this sort of attack today could rightly be brought up on charges of committing war crimes. It's no wonder that many church leaders have declared this Psalm—or at least the last few verses of it—to be “inappropriate for reading in public worship.” It is deeply troubling and offensive.

And yet how different is this outcry against Israel's tormentors from some of the language we heard in the aftermath of September 11? The tone of responses went very quickly from grief to vengeance. Within hours of the attacks, President Bush declared to the nation, “Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.” Less than a week later, at the Pentagon, the President affirmed his desire to capture Osama bin Laden “dead or alive.” Three years later, in the midst of the presidential election of 2004, we again heard the promise to “hunt down and kill” bin Laden—only this time it wasn't President Bush but his challenger John Kerry who made the vow.

On the face of them, these declarations seeking revenge are vastly different from the intent to “take . . . little ones and dash them against the rock!” Our leaders were talking about capturing certain terroristic masterminds and bringing them to justice, not slaughtering children. And yet in the actual practice of what our nation has done, there is not as much difference as we'd like to think there is.

Our leaders may speak of “battling terrorists” and “strategic strikes” and “collateral damage,” but the reality is that there are a lot of people dying in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—and far too many of them are children. By one estimate somewhere around 90,000 civilians have died since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. While the numbers are down from where they once were, there were still more than 600 Iraqi civilians killed in August. 11 of those were children. Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch that civilian deaths in Afghanistan are up dramatically over the past year due to increased air strikes. Bombs dropped from thousands of feet up cannot distinguish between combatant and noncombatant, or between terrorists and children. So while our words sound noble and rational, the reality is that tens of thousands of civilians, including children, are dying in the wars that continue to rage in response to 9/11. Yet Osama bin Laden remains at large.

So which is worse? Wishing that the children of your enemies would be slaughtered, even though you are powerless to actually do anything about it? Or using high-sounding language of justice and liberty while pursuing tactics that result in the deaths of thousands?

The fact is that there is a big difference between the writer of Psalm 137 and the leaders of our nation. The psalmist uses language that is indeed shocking to us. But at least he is being honest—brutally honest. Having been taken from his home and his country, stripped of everything he has known, the only thing left to him are his feelings. And so he gives voice to those feelings, knowing fully that he is no position to actually do the things he writes about.

In fact, he never even says that he actually wants to do them himself. He begins this section by calling on the Lord to remember the fall of Jerusalem. The rest of the psalm may thus be seen as a desire for God to act, for God to seek vengeance on Israel's enemies, for God to bring justice. In the

end, the psalmist leaves the outcome to God alone.

We, as a nation, have not left things in God's hands. We have trusted not in the justice and mercy of God, but in our own weapons and strategies. Perhaps we need to be as honest about how we really feel as the psalmist has dared to be. Perhaps we need to admit—at least to ourselves—the sorrow and fear and anger that we still carry with us seven years after the attacks of 9/11.

Sung: *By the waters, the waters of Babylon,  
we sat down and wept, and wept for thee Zion.  
We remember thee, remember thee, remember thee, Zion.*

The genuine sorrow that we all experienced on September 11, 2001 was relatively short-lived. We as a nation moved very quickly from bereavement over the loss of life, to fear of what might happen next, to anger at those who perpetrated these attacks and those who supported them, to vengeance against anyone who might have been even remotely associated with the terrorists. We moved on as fast as we could, encouraged by our leadership to just get back to “normal,” even though normal has been redefined to include a seemingly never-ending “war on terror,” detention of suspects indefinitely and without trial and acceptance of torture. We simply didn't allow ourselves time to mourn. Seven years later, I fear that we have never really taken the time to grieve for what happened on 9/11 and for everything that we lost in the attacks.

Noted evangelical author and preacher Brian McLaren wrote on the anniversary of the tragedy this past Thursday, “In many ways we have run from the feelings of that day ... grief, grievance, unity, confusion, dislocation, vulnerability and solidarity. In many ways, we quickly transmuted those emotions into ones that we are more familiar with, ones we know how to “work with” -- anger, lust for revenge, blame, scapegoating, offended pride, even hate.” McLaren concludes by suggesting that perhaps we should take those initial feelings of grief and confusion and so on and “hold them up . . . to the light of God.” In so doing, he says, “you will see the ways in which these emotions can open us towards the living God of love.”

McLaren's suggestion echoes the words of Father Richard Rohr, who wrote only a few months after the September 11 attacks, “Grief, especially shared grief like we are experiencing now, has unparalleled power to open our eyes and open our heart, but only over the patient long haul . . . We must teach people not to get rid of the pain until we have learned what it has to teach *us*. Not what it has to teach others! . . . Much of our understandable anger,” says Rohr, “is actually disguised and denied sadness.”

Rohr understands this time of grief as “Sacred Space.” For within this space, one is able to recognize one's ultimate reliance upon God and one's own powerlessness apart from God. “Inside of sacred space,” says Rohr, “you are indestructible, even though you feel quite vulnerable. . . . Inside of sacred space you can love America and critique America at the same time. Inside of sacred space you can weep for the bigger evil of which both sides are victims. Inside of sacred space you can imagine an alternative universe because you have now been there yourself.”

Psalm 137 is indeed one model for how the people of God might grieve in the midst of tragedy. But perhaps an even better model of “Sacred Space” for Christians can be found in Jesus' reaction in today's New Testament reading. As the passage opens, Jesus is warned that Herod—the ruler of his

home province of Galilee—is looking to kill him. Jesus' response to this news is a very emotional one. His first words are angry—referring to Herod as “that fox.”(v. 32)

Now, “fox” might seem like a rather mild term given the names that our leaders have used for Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, but it's a pretty harsh term coming from the mouth of Jesus. Foxes today have a reputation of being sly and cunning. But in Jesus' time, they were considered as relatively insignificant creatures—more of a nuisance than a real threat. Foxes were pests, not predators. So Jesus' use of the term in regard to a Roman-appointed ruler is rather dismissive. Herod, he is saying, might be kind of annoying, but his threats aren't going to keep Jesus from “casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow”(v. 32) and heading on to Jerusalem to finish his work (v. 33). Jesus is almost daring Herod, “Just try and stop me!”

This defiant attitude, however, is not where Jesus ends his statement. As he looks ahead to Jerusalem where he knows he is likely to be killed, he has every reason to be angry and fearful. Yet while those emotions may have been present, they were not the primary feelings or the ones upon which he ultimately acted. For after expressing his anger towards Herod, Jesus turns his attention to Jerusalem in lament. Although he knows that he will likely die there, his grief is not for himself. Instead he laments over the hard-heartedness and the fear that drives those who seek to kill him. He mourns for the judgment that they will ultimately bring upon themselves rather than for his own death.

In the end, Jesus does not seek vengeance upon his enemies. He does not wish that their children be dashed against the rocks. No, he longs to gather the children in his arms to love and protect them from the very evil that their parents and leaders are bringing upon themselves(v. 34) Jesus' grief leads him to a healthy and constructive response to the great tragedy that he faces. Because he is able to work through his anger and sorrow and fear, Jesus does not want to destroy his enemies in hate, but to transform them in love.

Last December, National Public Radio aired an essay for their “This I Believe” series in which a woman using the pseudonym Alex Anderson spoke of her belief in such power: the power of redemption. Anderson was an interrogator at the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay. She came there after having spent 18 months in Iraq- first as a soldier and then as a civilian contractor. What she experienced in Iraq left her feeling defeated, frightened and tired. She suffered an emotional breakdown that led her to be hospitalized and forced her to work through her own grief from the war.

Her experience led her to better understand the detainees with whom she worked. She says, “We were all exhausted. Many of them came back from a war having lost friends, too. I wondered how many of them still heard screaming at night like I did.”

Anderson speaks of one detainee in particular—a man she calls Mustafa. He joked that she was his favorite interrogator, and she joked back that he was her favorite terrorist. Then one day Mustafa asked her, quite suddenly, “You know everything about me, but still you do not hate me. Why?”

Anderson reports, “His question stopped me cold. I said 'Everyone has done things in their past that they're not proud of. I know I have, but I also know God still expects me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. That means you.'”

Mustafa started to cry. 'That's what my God says, too,' he said."

*Sung: By the waters, the waters of Babylon,  
we sat down and wept, and wept for thee Zion.  
We remember thee, remember thee, remember thee, Zion.*

(Congregation Joins In, #148 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*)

## APPENDIX C

### Joe Average

A sermon based on Matthew 18:10-14

Preached on October 26, 2008

If you head west on I-70, right before you get to Topeka, there's a sign for a church. It's one of these signs with movable letters where you can change the message. There's a different message there now, but for a long time—probably most of the past year—the message read as follows. “No one is lost. None need saving.”

Now, obviously this is not exactly a mainstream sort of church. And I suppose they were probably trying to present a different image of churches in Topeka than the one that a lot of folks might have given the city's notorious church group that travels around the country carrying signs boldly announcing all the people that God hates. Still, every time I would drive past that sign, I'd have to wonder what on earth the authors were thinking. No one is lost? Really? *No one?*

Not only does that run completely counter to what Jesus has to say in today's New Testament reading, it also runs counter to my own experience. I meet people all the time who are wandering around, desperately lost and hoping that someone will find them and save them. Frankly, there are times that I still feel lost myself. Sure, most of the time I think I'm comfortably in the sheep pen with the rest of the flock. But sometimes I discover that, without ever realizing it, I have strayed from the fold and am welcomed once again in the loving arms of the shepherd.

It's a common story. We like to think we're one of the 99, but deep down realize that—like the one—we, too, wander off on our own from time to time. That's what happened to somebody I'd like you to meet. We'll call him Joe. No, not Joe the Plumber, just Joe. Joe Average. Here's his story:

I guess I've always kind of resented all the attention that people get when they screw up. You know what I mean? I'm talking about the way so many folks fall all over themselves to help out the people who mess up their lives. It seems like there's always some program or some agency that's set up to bail out the chronic screw-ups. But no one ever pays attention to those of us who just do our jobs like we're expected to do. No one ever notices us. It's not fair.

I've always been this way. I remember already in third grade—in Mrs. Dusselhoff's class—there was this kid who was always getting trouble: Alan. Alan was constantly messing around; never paid any attention in class. When the rest of us were trying to master our multiplication tables, Alan was throwing spit wads. When the rest of us were laboring to write our names in cursive, Alan was scrawling dirty words on the bathroom wall. When the rest of us were wanting to play on the playground, Alan was taking away the ball or pushing some kid off the jungle gym.

As a result, Mrs. Dusselhoff was devoting a lot of her time and attention to Alan. I must have heard her use his name twenty times every day. “Alan, get your feet off the desk!” “Alan, stop pulling Jenny's hair!” “Alan, sit down and do your assignment!” But she hardly ever used my name.

I remember one time I fell down on the playground and skinned my knee. I was crying and she came over and knelt down by me and asked me, “Are you OK, John?” I looked at her through my tears

and said, “My name is Joe.”

She looked surprised and said, “I’m sorry. I know your name.” But I wasn’t convinced. That’s when it first hit me that it wasn’t fair that so much time and effort was spent on people like Alan, and so little attention was paid to those like me. The principal, school social worker, special ed teachers, paras—all of them were focusing on Alan. But what about the rest of us? What about the 99 out of 100 of us who were just normal kids, doing what we were supposed to do? Why didn’t we get any attention?

That was only the beginning. It was the same all through school. In high school, so much energy and resources were put into making sure those marginal folks didn’t drop out—that the screw-ups would still get a diploma. Even in spite of that, Alan never did.

In college, a whole army of coaches and tutors was employed to help all the jocks keep their GPA up. When a basketball player’s grandmother died, it made the headlines and the college president publicly expressed his sympathy. But when it was my grandma’s funeral, no said a thing. One of my professors even made me bring in a copy of the obituary before he would grant me an excused absence. That basketball player never did graduate. I did; but no one noticed.

When I got my first job, it seemed as though things were finally changing. It was a decent job in a mid-sized firm. In the high pressure business world, it seemed that those who messed up got weeded out pretty quickly. The boss didn’t have time to pay all that extra attention to the Alans of the world like Mrs. Dusselhoff had. I figured that if I’d just bide my time and do my work, then sooner or later someone was bound to notice. But before long, I realized that it wasn’t quite that simple.

There was this guy in the cubicle next to me named Lou who was hired a few months after I was. Lou was one of those guys who always went to lunch a little early and came back just a little late. I could hear him talking on his phone to his girlfriend or his buddies for long conversations when he was supposed to be working. But somehow he always managed to hang up before the boss came around. I didn’t want to be a tattle-tale. I always figured he’d get found out sooner or later.

In fact, I thought his gig was up when he completely screwed up on one of our firm’s biggest accounts. He’d been assigned to research some of the numbers that the client needed. He never got around to it, though. I guess he was too busy planning his poker nights and flirting to do any real work—until one day the boss gets this call from the client, wanting to know where in the world the figures were and why they hadn’t gotten them and threatening to take their business elsewhere.

I thought it was all over for Lou. The boss came out and read him the riot act. “Where are those numbers? And why the blankity-blank don’t you have them? And what the blankity-blank have you been up to, anyway?” I’d never seen him so angry. I thought he’d fire Lou on the spot. But instead he gave him 24 hours to get the numbers.

Then, as soon as the boss had stormed back to his office, Lou pokes his head around the cubicle wall all pale and sorry-looking and begs me to help him out. I guess I felt sorry for him. Sure, he was always screwing around, but I didn’t really want him to get fired. Besides, I figured if I helped him out, maybe I could get noticed for a change. So I busted my butt. And, to his credit, it was probably the only time that Lou actually cut his lunch short to finish the project. By the time the boss came back exactly 24 hours later, we had the spreadsheet all ready. I could tell he was impressed. But even

though I had ended up doing most of the work, Lou was the one who got all the credit for saving the account—and the raise that went with it. What's more, he had caught the attention of those higher up, which put him on the fast track for management.

It wasn't fair. Lou had created the problem in the first place. But when I stepped in to get him out of it, he ended up with all the credit and none of the blame. That's the story of my life. I'm just Joe Average—the guy who does my job and is responsible and plays by the rules, but never gets noticed. Sure, I've had a few promotions along the way—but just the sort of usual advances that one would expect after being with the same company for as long as I have. Lou has his own office by now, while I'm still stuck in a cubicle.

Everything else in my life is pretty normal, too. I got married along the way. Had a couple of kids. We've got a house, two cars, a dog. We go to church, and I dutifully put my check in the offering plate when it goes by. But no one has ever asked me to contribute in any other way. No one seems to notice if I'm not there for a couple of weeks. I guess as long as I keep the pew warm and give them my money, they're satisfied.

It's not that I expect folks to be falling all over me or anything. I just wish that, every once in a while somebody—somebody—would pay some attention to me: my boss, my pastor, my wife. Most of the time they don't really seem to care that I'm there at all.

I suppose that's why I've always had a problem with that story that Jesus tells about the lost sheep. You know, the one where the shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders off somewhere. So the shepherd has to leave behind the other ninety-nine and go looking for it. Now, I've learned to accept that part of it. Even though it puts the vast majority of the flock in danger, I can accept that it's the shepherd's job to look for the one that is lost. But what's always bugged me is what Jesus says next. He says that the shepherd “*rejoices* over [the one lost sheep] more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.”(v. 13)

Frankly, I've always resented that. It's one thing for the shepherd to do his job and seek out the lost sheep. But does he have to celebrate it? Does he have to reward the one for getting lost? Does he have to rub it in the faces of all the other sheep? As one of the ninety-nine that just does what I'm supposed to do, I'd really like to know.

Well, I guess you could say that my wish came true. It just goes to show you that you need to be careful what you wish for. Because I found out what it means to be the other one.

It started with a call at the office from my wife, Sue, who was very upset. She told me that our teenage son, Zach, hadn't come home from school yet. She called his cell phone several times, but there was never any answer. She called around to some of his friends' homes, but he wasn't at any of them, either. Eventually she called the school and found out that he hadn't shown up at all that day. In fact, she said, neither had Mike. And no one was answering at Mike's house.

I had to ask who Mike was. Then she got even more upset as she explained to me that Mike was Zach's best friend who he'd been spending a lot of time with for several months now. Then she started chewing me out for never talking to Zach—that if I had I'd at least know who Mike was; that I didn't really know my own son. Well, of course, I defended myself, but said I needed to finish up a

couple of things at work and would be home as soon as I could.

When I hung up, though, it occurred to me that Sue was right. I didn't know my son. Sure, I made sure his grades didn't get too low. I tried to make it to his ball games as often as I could. And I went in to see the vice principal when he had a couple of issues at school and got into a couple of fights. But I never really spent much time talking to him. I didn't know who his friends were. I didn't know what he did for fun, what music he was listening to, what kinds of movies or books he was interested in. I'd been so busy doing my job—doing exactly what I was supposed to do—that I'd missed out on what was really important.

For what may have been the first time ever, I left work early that day. I left some phone calls unreturned. I didn't come to a good stopping point in my projects. I just picked up and walked out of the office and went home.

By the time I got there, Sue had looked through Zach's room, and was disturbed to find that several changes of clothes were missing as though he'd planned to be gone for a while. She still hadn't been able to reach Mike's mom, so we headed over to her house in the car. Everything was locked up tight, with no lights on.

Finally, we decided we needed to head down to the police station and file a report. They took all the information on Zach and as much as we—or at least my wife—could tell them about Mike. We thought maybe they'd issue an Amber Alert. But given that the boys were already sixteen, that there was no evidence of abduction or immediate danger the case didn't meet their criteria. I kept hoping that someone would tell us that we shouldn't worry—that this sort of thing happens all the time and the kids always show up just fine. But they just told us that they'd let us know if they found anything. There was nothing left for us to do but go home and wait.

So that's what we did. Sue called the pastor and asked to have the news put out on the church prayer chain. The pastor said she would and offered to come over to our house. But Sue said that wasn't necessary. There was nothing to do, anyway, except to wait and to hope that Zach was OK. I tried not to think about where he might be; lying in a ditch after an accident; or in a hospital hours away badly injured—or worse. I tried not to consider the fact that I might not ever see him again.

Partly to take my mind off things, and partly to start making up for the lousy job I'd done of being a father, I spent time with my daughter, Chloe. I tried to get a sense for how she was feeling about her brother's disappearance. I tried to find out what she was up to these days. I tried to get to know her. But I think we both realized pretty quickly that I have practically nothing in common with 12-year-old girls. And neither of us really had the energy to make the connection at that point. So we all just waited, not sure what to do.

The call came shortly after midnight. None of us had even thought about going to bed yet. And when the phone rang, we all just looked at it for a few seconds—not sure if we dared find out the news. I finally picked it up on the third ring. It was the sheriff's department a couple of counties over. They had Zach. “Is he OK?” I asked.

“He's fine,” the deputy assured me, “But we picked up him and his friend speeding down the highway in a car they apparently 'borrowed' without the owner's permission. We also found several

empty beer cans and an open bottle of vodka. I'm afraid your son is under arrest.”

At least I think he said all that on the phone. All I remember for sure, though, were those first two words: “He's fine.” My son was fine. I filled in Sue as quickly as I could and headed out the door to pick Zach up. All I could think about as I drove along was how excited I was to see my son again and how great it would be to have him back home.

Somewhere along the way, I remembered the story that Jesus told. And for the first time, I understood why the shepherd was so ready to celebrate. I understood why he would leave the rest of the sheep behind and pay so much attention to the one who was lost. After all, hadn't I just left my home, my wife and my daughter in the middle of the night to go pick up my son who had been found?

That was several months ago. It hasn't been all easy since then, but there have been plenty of other reasons to rejoice along the way. We found a good counselor who is working not only with Zach, but with all of us to be the family that we should have been all along. We found a decent lawyer and caring judge who was willing to work with us so that Zach wouldn't need to go to jail or juvenile hall. We found friends, family members and people at our church who cared about us and what was happening with Zach.

And somewhere along the way, I realized that Zach wasn't the only one who had been found. So had I. I had always seen myself so much as one of the 99'ers that it never occurred to me that I was wandering off. I had always been so resentful of all those “losers” who got so much attention that I never realized how little attention I was paying to the “little ones” that I was supposed to be taking care of. I was so envious of the shepherd rejoicing over the lost sheep that I never understood how much I was cared for and loved, too.

I'm not so resentful of the attention that those lost sheep get any more. In fact, I'm glad that there are so many ways that God used to bring attention to my son when he was lost. I'm grateful to all those who showed God's mercy to me when I was wandering and didn't even know it. I'm even able to celebrate and rejoice when another lost sheep is found and brought back into the fold.

You'll never guess who I ran into the other day: Alan. I probably hadn't seen him since he dropped out of high school. In all those years, I hadn't thought much at all about what might have happened to him. Turns out he's got his own little business where he buys up old cars at auction, then fixes them up and sells them. He's married, too, and has several kids—a couple of them the same age as mine.

For the first time I was able to see Alan as another member of the flock, not as the one who was lost. For the first time I was able to view him as just another average guy, not as someone who was always screwing up. And for the first time, I was able not to resent any of the success and attention he might have. In fact, I was even able to rejoice with him.

Thank God.

## APPENDIX D

### Focus Group Questions\*

1. Did you hear the good news? If so, what did you hear?
  2. What emotions did you experience during the message? (After several initial responses, the facilitator held up a list of possible emotions that respondents might want to talk about: happy, sad, hopeful, disgusted, afraid, loving, angry, tense/serious, excited, proud, ashamed, guilty, aroused, depressed, energized.)
  3. What other images, words, or ideas—not necessarily mentioned in the sermon—came to your mind during the sermon?
  4. How did the *music*/STYLE OF DRAMA that Richard used this morning enhance or distract from the message?
  5. *What emotions do you recall having felt immediately following the September 11 attacks? If you experienced fear and/or anger, how have you dealt with those feelings?*
- HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED “LOSTNESS” OR “FOUNDNESS?” DID THE SERMON HELP YOU CONNECT WITH THOSE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR LIFE?
6. How has Richard's preaching about *lament and working through your fears*/THE LOST AND FOUND caused or inspired you to see or do things differently in your day-to-day life?
  7. Is there anything else that you'd like to say with regard to *lament, September 11*/THIS SERMON ABOUT “LOSTNESS” or Richard's preaching in general?

\*Words and phrases in *italics* were used only following the September 14 sermon. Those in SMALL CAPITALS were used only following the October 26 sermon.

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