Exactly how a move is developed is determined by where the hearers are with regard to its assertion as well as what each move needs to do in relation to advancing the sermon's overall gospel.

Moves are connected by some sort of logic of movement that parallels the way we naturally think. Together, a sermon's moves form an on-the-move rhetorical journey. For example, in a sermon on 2 Cor 5:17-21, the moves might be logically sequenced in accord with Scripture in this way:

Move 1: We like to keep accounts so we know we are in the clear.
Move 2: But in Christ, God has torn up all the account books, reconciling all debts in Christ.
Move 3: So you know what this means? We are already a part of God's new creation in Christ.
Move 4: So is it not about time that we quit trying to earn God's favor and just enjoy living in the free and clear grace of God?
Move 5: Then we can be Christ's ambassadors, spreading the good news so others can get in on the grace of God's new life, too.

This structure starts where a congregation may be with regard to the theology of grace by acknowledging the world's way of thinking that affects our existence. The moves could be organized in different ways using the same rhetoric of Scripture, depending upon where the preacher discerns the congregation is in the process of detaching from sin and adhering to Christ at a particular time.

Based on his field research of good preaching, Buttrick has fairly strict prescriptions for a move: its first two or three sentences should assert one central idea that the move will explore for about three minutes. These opening sentences are crucial in that they need to focus hearers' attention quickly, show the connective logic to the last move while yet distinguishing it as another move, indicate the perspective from which we will be exploring the assertion, and set the mood of the move. The development of a move needs to demonstrate the assertion in accord with a logical, experiential pattern, and the move should end by reiterating the focal idea before pausing to go on to the next move (1987, 23–79).

Buttrick says nothing new in one sense. Good preachers and speakers have always used focused units of unified language in order to unfold the meaning of a sermon. What is new is the emphasis on the movement of God-talk so that the language can do what Scripture does instead of merely talk about God from a distance. Most homiletics today consist of narrated plots of meaning. Eugene Lowry, for instance, talks about the narrative movement of a sermon's words unfolding in time like scenes in a drama (2001, 12–87). Whereas Lowry's homiletic demands a set movement of form, however, Buttrick's moves are more flexible in the sermonic patterns they can unfold. Moves can be put together in a variety of ways, depending upon the function and overall goal of the sermon, which follows not dramatic theory, but Scripture's imaged theology and the movement of life in Christ.

Buttrick's insistence upon the importance of a move's focal sentences is helpful in orienting listeners as to which aspect of the multiple meanings of illustrations, images, analogies, and examples they are to focus upon. (*See* FOCUS AND FUNCTION.) Without such focal sentences at move openings, a sermon can seem like a string of unrelated stories with no coherence. The closing sentence that reiterates the focus of a move helps hearers easily follow the preacher without having to work so hard to figure out where they are on the rhetorical journey of the sermon. Slavishly followed without internal variety of development, moves can sound mechanical. Done well, however, moves focus oral language in such a way that hearers feel as though the preacher is speaking their thoughts for them in holy conversation with the living Lord Jesus Christ who calls us to participate in the divine work of transforming us and the world to the glory of God.

*Bibliography:* David Buttrick. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures.* (1987); Richard Eslinger. *The Web of Preaching.* (2002); Thomas G. Long. *The Witness of Preaching.* (2005); Eugene Lowry. *The Homiletical Plot.* (2001); Lucy Rose. *Sharing the Word.* (1997).

## MUSIC

*See* ARTS.





## NARRATIVE PREACHING

*Eugene L. Lowry*

The term *narrative preaching* has come to include several kinds of quite similar sermons—linked together by the fact that all involve some kind of procedural plot. The term *narrative*, however, is not as self-explanatory as it might seem.

Any story sermon is, of course, a form of narrative preaching, but a narrative sermon does not necessarily include a story. Toni Craven, professor of OT at Brite Divinity School, speaks of narrative as temporal sequence (source or presentation) (1996, 4). Hence, by this definition any sermon that is shaped by means of temporal sequence is a narrative sermon. Bishop Gerald Kennedy once published a book of sermon manuscripts based on several parables of Jesus (1960). Some were traditional three-point sermons. One might say that Kennedy took a narrative text (source) and turned it into a non-narrative sermon (presentation). On the other hand, a narrative preacher, for example, will turn a non-narrative Pauline text into the shape of a plotted sermon—moving from issue to resolution. Any narrative-style preacher utilizing the parable known as the story of the Prodigal Son will shape a narrative, narrative sermon. That is, the text (source) was of narrative shape, and the sermon (presentation) also was of narrative shape.

More important—and often ignored by writers in the field of preaching—the central consideration of narrative preaching goes far beyond and deeper than the matters of form or shape reductionistically considered.

One cannot speak of form outside the larger question of substance or meaning. H. Grady Davis makes it clear that there is no such thing as substance without form (1958, 1–17). Indeed, form is the shape that substance takes. One cannot have an idea without its being embodied, or have a completely unformed thought. It may be a poorly formed thought, which may drastically violate one's intention. We all can recall a moment in conversation when we offered our view on a matter and then declared, "No, that's not what I mean at all. Let me try that again." All of which is to say that substance/form is one entity. This may in part be what Craddock meant when he said that how one speaks is considered by hearers to be what one speaks (1974, 145).

So when sermon form is changed, substance changes. Gospel claims muted by dry, suspenseless recital are utterly different in meaning, substance, and power from a decisive, even surprising turn from hopelessness to grace. So, for example, when followers of the lectionary preach their once-every-three-years sermon on Jonah by beginning with 3:1—the second call of Jonah—they miss the powerful meaning of Nineveh's repentance as well as God's. Left out altogether is the rebellion of the first call; missing is the incredible grace offered when judgment literally threw Jonah into the water. Formed that way, the story ends with an empty resolution because it lacks the prior irresolution that gives the story its anticipation, tension, pleasure, and power. This is not just minor tampering with homiletical form. It may be the difference between report and proclamation. No wonder Jesus used parables.

Moreover, narrative preaching takes seriously the fact that a sermon is not an object in space but an event in time. Hence, one does not construct a sermon like putting together a brick wall. To do so is to reify the gospel. The intent is not to make a piece of the gospel for Sunday but to effect an event. Said H. Grady Davis: "The proper design of a sermon is a movement in time. It begins at a given moment, it ends at a given moment, and it moves through the intervening moments one after another" (1958, 163). He compared a sermon to music, "not music in the score but in the live performance . . . bar . . . after bar . . . never all at once" (1958, 163). Hence, "If we wish to learn from other arts," he admonished, "we must learn from . . . arts based on a time sequence" (1958, 164).

Indeed, we might learn from the writing of Jeremy S. Begbie, Cambridge theologian and professional musician, who clarifies music's time as something that involves "an integral relational order . . . driving toward rest and closure . . . leading to some kind of goal or 'gathering together'" (2000, 38). In our context, a narrative sermon is any sermon in which the arrangement of ideas takes the form of a plot involving a strategic delay of the preacher's meaning. Otherwise put: the narrative sermon moves from "itch to scratch." It is an ordered form of moving time.

The roots of all this in the Western world go back at least as far as Aristotle's *Poetics*. His view of narrative plot involves four steps along the way, moving from conflict to complication to peripeteia to denouement (1949). That is, a narrative sermon

(tightly defined) begins with an issue, born of the biblical text's inclusion of some kind of disjuncture, that then becomes further complicated. This conflict and complication intensifies by means of logic, image, or story—depending on the text, purpose, and occasion. The decisive central shift, typically coming in the final third of the sermon, has been called the peripeteia, reversal, or sudden shift—one that makes possible a resolution born of the gospel.

For example, the Martha and Mary story in Luke experiences this sudden shift when Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better part (Luke 10:42). This story is not an anti-kitchen story but an anti-exclusion story. The point is not to lecture Martha about priorities but to assert that for all disciples the highest good is time at the feet of Jesus.

With this shift leading to, facilitated by, or arising out of the good news, the sermon has found the grounds for resolution—pointing toward a new future for the people of God. All of which is to suggest that the imperative of the gospel's claim is not reducible to some kind of ethic of obedience, but is undergirded by the good news. In the illustration of Martha and Mary, the biblical story carries the theological freight—the message through the concluding stages of the plot. A sermon on Ps 23 will more likely utilize the biblical images to carry the thread of thought. A sermon based on Romans concerning the grounds for salvation more likely will feature ongoing logical engagement of the issues at stake. What this means for preparing the sermon is clear. The narrative preacher's first question of the text is not finding the sermon's final point or resolutional "answer." Rather, the first question has to do with discovering the disjuncture, issue, juxtaposition, or context that reveals the conflict calling for resolution by means of the good news.

Generally, such disjuncture is found within the text itself—perhaps in an apparent conflict among several texts or between the context of the text and that of the congregation. Looking for such conflict quickens the mind, first of the preacher and then of the congregation. As a result, sermon preparation finds both focus and efficiency.

Note, too, that this means that narrative preaching should not and cannot be reduced to an older topical style of preaching based on what often are called felt needs.

This sermonic disjuncture, the conflict needing resolution, must not only be sustained; it should also become further complicated. Often preachers feeling called to provide sermonic/liturgical answers succumb to the temptation to resolve the matter quickly without deeper exploration. The results are that the congregation loses interest as the quick resolution retires the tension and anticipation, and that the power of the real gospel becomes stunted by superficial answers offered too quickly.

Regarding jazz improvisation, Leroy Ostransky noted that the difference between great and ordinary musicians has to do not with the eloquence of the final resolution but with the profundity of the prior irresolution (1960, 83). In preaching, therefore, the opening disjunctive conflict must not be allowed to vanish; it must continue, with even greater complication prior to resolution born of the gospel.

Commitment to "maintaining the 'not yet' of resolution," notes Begbie, "is generally reckoned to be one of the crucial skills to be learned by any composer" (2000, 100). Accomplishing this in preaching is crucial but not all that difficult. The most significant key is the preacher's mind-set—allowing the issues to deepen rather than reaching for quick, superficial moves of do's and don'ts that tend to resolve issues by means of admonition. Strategic delay of the sermon's conclusion is the means. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the Holy Spirit can work better with us in the context of ambiguities raised by the biblical issues than with the firmness of our certainties brought to the text in advance.

Finally, there are variations of this narrative-based sermon model. Craddock once called it inductive preaching (1974), Buttrick spoke of patterned moves (1987), Rose named confessional preaching (1997), Mitchell called it celebration (1990), and Troeger utilizes episodal form (1990). The designation utilized for this larger grouping—often known as the New Homiletic—might be plotted preaching. Note that there are substantive differences in these various approaches. Yet, at the same time, they all share commitment to forms of sermonic shape that intend toward a corporate event of the good news. *See* INDUCTIVE; MOVES; NARRATIVE FORM; NARRATIVE THEORY; NEW HOMILETIC.

***Bibliography:*** Aristotle. *Aristotle's Poetics.* (1949); Jeremy S. Begbie. *Theology, Music and Time.* (2000); Walter Brueggemann. *Finally Comes the Poet.* (1989); David Buttrick. *Homiletic.* (1987); Fred Craddock. *As One Without Authority.* (1974); Toni Craven. "An Introduction to Narrative." Paper presented at Society of Biblical Literature. Irving, Tex., March 16, 1996; H. Grady Davis. *Design for Preaching.* (1958); Gerald Kennedy. *The Parables.* (1960); Eugene L. Lowry. *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery.* (1997); Eugene L. Lowry. *The Homiletical Plot.* Expanded ed. (2001); Henry H. Mitchell. *Celebration and Experience in Preaching.* (1990); Leroy Ostransky. *The Anatomy of Jazz.* (1960); Lucy Atkinson Rose. *Sharing the Word.* (1997); David J. Schlafer. *Surviving the Sermon.* (1992); Thomas H. Troeger. *Imagining a Sermon.* (1990).





## NARRATIVE THEORY

***Barbara K. Lundblad***

Narrative theory describes one way of knowing. Psychologist Jerome Bruner says that human beings come to know the world and express what they know in two very broad ways. The first way is "logico-scientific," conveyed through logical propositions. The second way of knowing is conveyed through narrative. Bruner claims that narrative is the most basic way in which people give meaning to their experiences, a way of knowing that crosses cultures and time periods (1986, 11–14). For many years preaching fell primarily within the way of knowing through propositions: statements of meaning distilled from biblical texts, spoken as truth and supported by sub-points that substantiated the primary propositional claim. The Bible itself was viewed as a deposit of truths that interpreters and preachers could mine through careful excavation.

Narrative theory suggests a different way of knowing, a different way of interpreting texts, and a different way of preaching. This methodology has reshaped preaching, especially since the 1970s with the publication of Fred Craddock's book *As One Without Authority.* Craddock turned propositional preaching upside down, encouraging preachers to move through the same process in the pulpit that the preacher uses in engaging the text. Rather than beginning with a proposition, the sermon moves inductively toward the discovery of meaning by preacher and listener together. Others expanded on the work of Craddock and his predecessors, focusing on narrative movement rather than propositions in what has come to be known as the New Homiletic.

One key aspect of narrative is movement through time or temporal flow. Even mundane stories that describe getting up in the morning begin at a point in time and move on through time to an ending. People also tell stories in the present that recall events that happened in the past and that have a part in shaping the future. The Bible itself can be read as such a story, remembering the past, shaping the present, and calling the community of faith into the future. Through the lens of narrative theory, the Bible is viewed as one encompassing narrative, including not only those passages identified as stories, but non-narrative passages as well. Songs, proverbs, letters, apocalyptic visions, and Levitical codes are all set within the larger canonical frame of narrative. Some narrative interpreters see the Bible as the normative story that provides the grammar for the Christian community, claiming that the biblical narrative shapes the consciousness of those in the believing community. Feminists and persons of non-dominant cultures question such a claim since the experiences of women and those seen as "other" have not been fully included in the biblical narrative and have often been neglected in the church's narrative both past and present. (*See* FEMINIST CRITICISM.) Yet when feminists emphasize women's experience as a source of wisdom and as a hermeneutical guide, it is the narratives of women's lives that become the critical lens for reading Scripture.

A narrative approach to biblical interpretation insists that the narrative form itself is essential to the text's meaning. Rather than extracting a proposition from a narrative, the narrative itself holds the meaning, and that meaning cannot be separated from the form.

Thus, a parable does not simply have a point—the parable itself is the point, and its narrative quality invites the reader's participation. While historical-critical tools may be involved in setting a particular narrative in a historical time frame, it is the narrative itself that is most important. Other disciplines come into play in engaging narratives and responding to them. In *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* Robert Alter uses literary criticism to engage biblical texts with methods applied to non-biblical literature (1981, 12–13). Phyllis Trible explores the narrative through rhetorical criticism, paying close attention to repetitions, patterns, and movements within the narrative passage itself (1978, 10–11). These and other methodologies within the umbrella