The Role of Preaching In Worship

Roger L. Hahn
Nazarene Theological Seminary
Gordon MacDonald

• “For many young people choosing a church, worship leaders have become a more important factor than preachers. Mediocre preaching may be tolerated, but an inept worship leader can sink things fast.”
One Extreme

- If one listens to many in the contemporary music and worship arena the word “worship” has come to mean music.
- If one understands worship to be music then there is little or no connection between preaching and worship
The Other Extreme

• Worship is Preaching
• This was the case at various times in church history
• For a great deal of the 20th century everything prior to the sermon was described as “the preliminaries.” This makes preaching the primary form of worship, the only worthy expression of worship.
• It is still quite common for those who organize the elements of a service of evangelical, Christian worship to arrange and select those elements to lead to and to enhance the sermon. Preaching has conceptual priority, even if it does not receive the majority of the time spent in corporate worship.
Is a Balanced View of Preaching and Worship Possible?

• If we want to avoid the extremes and work with a balanced view of preaching and worship then we might say:
• Preaching is worship though it is not the totality of worship.
• The way that we understand the relationship of preaching and worship will depend on what we understand worship to be and what we understand preaching to be.
• The way we plan (organize and select elements of) worship will inevitably reflect what we believe about preaching and worship and the relationship between the two.
So – what is worship? The Biblical Vocabulary

• הָוָה (ḥāwâ) only in the Eshtaphal stem (formerly thought to be the Hithpael of שָׁחָה (šāḥâ) meaning to prostrate oneself or bow down is the most common word in the OT translated “worship”

• The most common word used in the NT is προσκυνέω (proskyneō) also means to prostrate oneself or to pay homage

• In both languages (and Testaments) the word for worship describes the physical response of the worshipper to the one being worshipped

• In the honor/shame culture of the biblical world to prostrate oneself was the required response to meeting someone who was extremely higher than oneself on the honor/shame scale
So – what is worship? The Biblical Vocabulary

• The second most common word referring to worship in the Old Testament is עָבַד (ʿābad) meaning “to work” or “to serve” as a slave or as a servant

• The second most common word referring to worship in the New Testament is λατρεύω (latreuō) (the noun is λατρεία (latreia)) meaning “to work” or “to serve whether the one who serves is a slave or free.” It was often used of service offered to the gods in temples

• In both languages (and Testaments) the word has physical connotation though it is sometimes used figuratively

• The emphasis is not on servile status, but on the function of carrying out the will of the master (κύριος – kyrios)
So – what is worship? The Biblical Vocabulary

• The biblical words for worship are used in both individual and corporate contexts
• The biblical words for worship describe bodily actions or practices – they never refer to a mood or an attitude
• The biblical words for worship always describe a response to another who is superior – prostrating oneself to/before God or serving, working as a servant of the κύριος – kyrios
• The focus of the biblical words for worship is placed on the One who is worshipped, not on the one(s) worshipping
So – what is worship? Biblical Practices

• If biblical worship is the response of physical actions/practices to the Lord (κύριος – *kyrios*) then worship will necessarily involve actions/practices commanded by the Lord

• One can appropriately describe all of life and all obedience to God as worship

• Historically and logically the work of corporate worship has come to claim the title of worship, but corporate worship must not be separated from all of life and all obedience to God

• Scripture commands a number of corporate responses to God
So – what is worship? Singing

• In worship we sing because God has commanded it. He commands us to sing to him songs of praise and adoration (Pss 47:1b; 96:1, 2; 98:1, etc.). He commands us to sing to each other words of encouragement and instruction (Col. 3:17; Eph. 5:19)

• Therefore the songs of our worship are not performances nor done for the sake of artistry alone, but are directed either to God as praise, thanksgiving, confession, or repentance or they are directed to each other as words of admonition and edification
So – what is worship? Playing Instruments

• In worship we use musical instruments because God has commanded it. He commands us to praise him with stringed, wind, and percussion instruments (1 Sam 10:5; 1 Chron 15:16; Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:27; Pss 33:2; 81:2-3; 92:1-3; 150:3-5)

• Several references in the Apocrypha make clear that stringed, wind, and percussion instruments were used in the worship of the 2nd Temple and thus the worship in which Jesus and the early church participated (Judith 16:1; 1 Maccabees 4:54; 13:51; 1 Esdras 5:59)

• These references indicate the instruments were played both in accompaniment to singing and without singing as instrumental praise
So – what is worship? Praying

• In worship we pray, because God has commanded it. He commands us to prayer prayers of intercession for our world and world leaders (1 Tim 2:1-2), prayers for healing (James 5:14), prayers of intercession for each other’s spiritual growth (Phil 1:9-11), prayers for safe travel and effective ministry (Rom 15:30-32), and prayers for the advance of the gospel (Eph 6:18-20)

• Our prayers are not simply performing a ritual but are prayed in the Spirit (Eph 6:18) because we know that such communication with God is the very source of our life (Amos 5:6)
So – what is worship? Bringing offerings

• In worship we bring our offering to the Lord because he has commanded it. He commands that we bring our tithe (Deut 14:22, 28; Mal 3:10) and our offerings (1 Cor 16:1-2)

• We recognize that our tithe and offerings help support the persons and institutions God has set apart for ministry (1 Cor 9:4-10) and to provide for those in need (1 Cor 16:1, etc.)

• We recognize that offerings of money and kind are not all that we offer to God; we also offer him the fruit of lips (Heb 13:15-16) and the totality of our lives (Rom 12:1-2)
So – what is worship? Reading God’s Word

• In worship we read God’s word because he has commanded it
• The public reading of Scripture is our command (1 Tim 4:13; 1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16; Isaiah 34:16) and also our delight (Pss 1:2; 19:7-10; 119)
• The word of God is effective in conviction (Heb 4:12-13), for comfort (Ps 119:50, 52, 76, etc.), for evangelism (Isaiah 55:11) and for instruction, rebuking, correction and edification in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
So – what is worship? Mutual encouragement

• In worship we encourage, exhort, and admonish one another because God has commanded it
• Such mutual upbuilding may be done with music (Col 3:16)
• It may be the exercise of a spiritual gift (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 14:3)
• Done in the body of Christ it is always following the example of Christ (Phil 2:1-11)
So – what is worship? The sacraments

- In worship we observe the sacraments because God has commanded it

- We are commanded to celebrate the Lord’s Supper as a proclamation of Christ’s death (1 Cor 11:26), as a participation in the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:21), as members of the covenant community (Mark 14:24), as a living remembering of Christ (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:25), and as an anticipation of his second coming (1 Cor 11:26, 29)

- We baptize in response to Christ’s command (Matt 28:19) because we know that it belongs with repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) and it marks the believer who has received the Spirit (Acts 2:38-3; 10:47) and who had died with Christ (Rom 6:3; Col 2:12)
So – what is worship? Preaching

• In worship we preach because God has commanded it
• The command is given in general to Christ’s disciples (Matt 10:7; 11:1) and specifically to certain persons (1 Tim 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2)
• We preach the gospel (Mark 13:10; 14:9; Rom 1:15), the kingdom of God (Lk 4:43; 16:16), peace (Eph 2:17), and Christ (1 Cor 1:23; Acts 8:35; 1 Cor 15:12; 2 Cor 1:19)
• We preach to the Jews (1 Cor 1:23), to the Gentiles (Gal 1:16; 2:2), to all (Mark 13:10), everywhere (2 Thess 3:1) in the whole world (Mark 14:9) in order that those who believe might be saved (Rom 10:13-15; 1 Cor 1:21) so that they might hold fast to that which they have heard (1 Cor 15:2)
So – what is worship?

• Worship is the corporate obedient response of the gathered/summoned people of God to God as he has revealed himself in creation and redemption

• There are 3 critical elements in this definition

• 1. The corporate obedient response involves the “elements” of worship described above – singing, playing instruments, praying, bringing offering, reading Scripture, observing the sacraments, encouraging each other, and preaching

• 2. Knowing what it means to be the people of God gathered and/or summoned to be in his presence to worship is critical for worship; part of the problem with our worship is our poverty of ecclesiology
So – what is worship?

• Worship is the corporate obedient response of the gathered/summoned people of God to God as he has revealed himself in creation and redemption

• 3. Knowing God is also critical for worship

• Such knowing of God is never complete and begins before faith and will not end until we see him face to face

• It is possible for this process of knowing God to proceed because God has revealed himself to us by creation and redemption

• This gives Scripture and preaching the Word of God major significance for worship
So – what is preaching? Biblical Vocabulary

• The verb κηρύσσω (kēryssō) is usually translated “preach” in the NT. Its basic meaning is to proclaim, to make a public announcement. It is not the delivery of a discourse in well-chosen words; it is the declaration of an event

• The corresponding noun κῆρυξ (kērux) is used only 3 times in the New Testament (1 Tim 2:7 and 2 Tim 1:11 referring to Paul and 2 Pet 2:5 referring to Noah). The basic meaning is a herald, one who makes public announcements

• There is no Hebrew word in the Old Testament consistently translated by this Greek word group
So what is preaching? Biblical Vocabulary

• Almost equal in frequency of use for preaching in the New Testament is εὐαγγελίζομαι (euangelizomai) which means “to bring good news” or “to announce good news”

• The cognate noun εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion) – “good news” occurs more than 60 times in the NT and the related noun εὐαγγελιστής (euangelistēs) – “evangelist” occurs 3 times

• The Old Testament uses the verb בִּשַּׂר (bissar) to describe the action of “proclaiming good news.” The LXX almost always translates בִּשַּׂר with εὐαγγελίζομαι
So – what is preaching? Biblical Vocabulary

• The direct objects of these verbs – the gospel, the kingdom of God, and Christ – make clear that preaching is theological proclamation and is a theological practice

• The indirect objects of these verbs (the audience to whom one preaches) make clear that preaching is a public and corporate event

• The contexts of these verbs makes clear that sometimes the audience is the general public (what we might call street preaching) – the world (to use another biblical term) - and sometimes it is the people of God gathered for worship – the church
So – what is preaching?

• Since we are considering the relationship of preaching and worship it is preaching in the context of the church to which we give attention

• However, Buttrick notes that congregations have a “double consciousness” – a consciousness of being the gathered people of God and also of being “in the world”

• In almost every gathering of the people of God there are persons who have not become disciples of Christ and many who are not fully devoted disciples and some who are being tested and/or tempted

• Thus preaching is never exclusively “evangelistic” or “teaching/nurturing.” Authentic preaching addresses all the people
So – what is preaching?

• Preaching to the gathered people of God is to be public announcement of the good news of the gospel, the kingdom of God, or Christ

• This means the purpose of preaching can never be reduced to imparting information, improving people’s ethics, or meeting people’s needs

• Remember the mid-20th century caricature of preaching – “A mild mannered person telling mild mannered people to become more mild mannered.”
So – what is preaching?

• Willimon addresses the purpose of preaching with these words:
  • “What difference does it make to our preaching that all of us there are either preparing for baptism or else trying to figure out what happened when we were baptized?”

• He asserts that preaching engages in a Distinctive Discourse and that it is corrupted when the preacher adopts the assumptions, grammar, and vocabulary of the culture at large

• He claims that the distinctive assumptions, grammar, and vocabulary of Christian preaching arise from the Christian canon of Scripture

• Scripture is of significant importance for preaching
So – what is preaching?

• Thomas Long begins with a simple picture of preaching drawn from Moltmann:

• “One person or more gets up in front of the congregation in order to preach the Gospel, to baptize, to prepare the meal, to arrange the feast, and to make his contribution to the discussion. These people come from the community but come forward in front of it and act in Christ’s name. It is not they as ‘office bearers’ who ‘confront’ the congregation; it is Christ. What they do and say is in the name of the triune God.”
So – what is preaching?

- Long notes four critical elements in Moltmann’s description:
  - 1. The Congregation – the gathered people of God – gathered from the world for the purpose of worship
  - 2. The Preacher – part of the community, but called to a new function, a new place, to speak a word in the name of Christ
  - 3. The Sermon – not the notes or manuscript for the sermon is action. It is an event of speaking and hearing performed by the preacher in the name of Christ
  - 4. The Presence of Christ – Preaching does not force God to come, but he graciously fulfills his promise to be present through his Word
So - what is preaching?

• The Protestant tradition has carefully distinguished between”
• The Living Word of God – Christ
• The Written Word of God – Scripture
• The Preached Word of God – Sermon
• The distinctions are important, but so are the commonalities
• All are the Word of God woven together in the preaching event so that the sermon opens up the Scriptures which point us to Christ
So – what is preaching?

• This means preaching must be conceptualized as originating from above, from a Word from God rather than from below, a human need.

• Preaching that is conceptualized as beginning from human need or human methods of self-help becomes captive to the assumptions and resources of the surrounding culture.

• It may stir the sinful pot, but it cannot transform the sinful person or the sinful community.

• This does not mean preaching should not seek words and forms that can be understood, but it does mean that the starting point of preaching is always with what God is doing or wanting to do.
So – what is preaching?

• Two phrases from Paul express the goal of preaching:
  • Gal 4:19 - I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you
  • Col 1:29 - We proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect/mature in Christ

• These phrases encompass the whole range of the ordo salutis from conviction of sin to conversion to sanctification and Christian growth and perfection

• The “you” of Gal 4:19 is plural – another indication that the purpose of preaching is not simply the formation of individuals but the formation of a Christian community in the image of Christ
So – how are preaching and worship related?

1. It should be clear that both preaching and worship are functions of the community – the body of Christ

2. Scripture commands preaching as part of the worship work of the church

3. If worship is the corporate obedient response of the gathered=summoned people of God to the revelation of God in Christ through creation and redemption, then at least preaching helps to convey that revelation to which the worshipping people of God respond

4. Preaching and worship belong together
So – how does it work in practice?

• We may think about the relationship of preaching and worship by examining the historical patterns of worship – which are basically two

• The oldest pattern of Christian worship of which we have record is a pattern of Word and Table

• Early Christian worship sang, read Scriptures, and heard the homily – the focus was on the Word of God

• Then they prayed and celebrated the Lord’s Supper - the focus was on the Table

• This two-fold pattern of worship has survived intact in Roman Catholic and Orthodox worship and is being recovered in Protestantism – both mainline and evangelical
So – how does it work in practice?

• The songs, prayers, and Scripture readings reach their climax in the preaching. Then the following songs, prayers, and offering reach a second climax in the Lord’s Supper.

• Another way to conceptualize this pattern is as an ellipse which has two foci (Word and Table) with every element connected to both.
So – how does it work in practice?

• A second pattern of Christian worship – almost as old is essentially a service of the Word
• Many of the monastic services of the hours were non-Eucharistic and they formed the pattern for characteristic Protestant worship as Word-centered (meaning climaxing with the sermon)
• Radical reformers and theologically uneducated Protestants of later centuries thought concluding with the Eucharist de-valued Preaching and they promoted Preaching only services (they also moved the pulpit to the center of the church)
• However, when most Protestants celebrate the Lord’s Supper they do so following the sermon – the influence still of Word and Table
So – how does it work in practice?

• Though the two primary patterns of Christian worship have historically been Word and Table and Preaching as the Climax of worship there have been (and are) other patterns

• The historic elements of corporate worship – singing, praying, reading Scripture, bringing an offering, sermon, and celebration of the Lord’s Supper – are usually present in a worship service but their function and significance is conceptualized in different ways by both ministers and the people

Mitchell’s Patterns of Worship

• The Variety Package (sometimes called the “Hymn Sandwich”) – a series of songs, prayers, Scripture readings, etc. strung together with no intended connection to each other or to any pattern.

  □   —   □   —   □  —  □  —  □  —  □  —  □

• The leader functions as a master of ceremonies who introduces each “act”
Mitchell’s Patterns of Worship

• The Thematic Approach – The elements are all related (as much as is possible) to an external concept – a theme. This is the most common pattern used by evangelicals who purposefully plan worship services.
Mitchell’s Patterns of Worship

• Conversational Approach – Each element is chosen because of a relationship with the previous element. e.g. A song sparks a prayer which leads to Scripture which then suggests an offering, etc.
Mitchell’s Patterns of Worship

• Dialogical Approach – The worship elements are consciously chosen to either impart a revelation from God or to express a response of the people to God. The elements are then placed to alternate and “create” a conversation or dialog between God and his people.
So – how does it work in practice?

- Mitchell’s analysis of the patterns was descriptive – based on his observations of American Protestant worship.
- However, it seems clear also that he presented the patterns in an order moving from least desirable to most desirable (to Mitchell).
- The Dialogical Approach that moves from revelation from God to a response of the people back to a revelation from God to a further response from the people, etc. fits most closely with the definition of worship given earlier - the corporate obedient response of the gathered/summoned people of God to God as he has revealed himself in creation and redemption.
So – how does it work in practice?

• Another way of describing worship practices among Protestants is by a combination of when the worship pattern developed and on how radically it departed from the historic pattern of Word and Table worship


• Some patterns shared general characteristics with each other in terms of how far they departed from the Word and Table format and others shared a century in which they came into being
White’s Chart of Protestant Worship in America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origins</th>
<th>Left Wing (far from Word and Table)</th>
<th>Centrist</th>
<th>Right Wing (near Word and Table)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th Century</td>
<td>Anabaptist</td>
<td>Reformed</td>
<td>Anglican, Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th Century</td>
<td>Quaker</td>
<td>Puritan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th Century</td>
<td></td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th Century</td>
<td>Frontier (Revivalist)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Century</td>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So – how does it work in practice?


• His proposal had three categories: 1. Worship that is music-organized, 2. Worship that is Word/preaching-organized, and 3. Worship that is Sacrament-organized (meaning the Lord’s Supper)

• He then laid his categories over White’s Chart without the historical development piece
Ruth’s Music, Word, Sacrament-Centered Worship Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music-Organized</th>
<th>Word/Preaching-Organized</th>
<th>Sacrament/Lord’s Supper-Organized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anabaptist</td>
<td>Reformed</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quaker</td>
<td>Puritan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontier/Revivalist</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So – how does it work in practice?

• Ruth connects the three categories to the way in which the worshippers most characteristically expect to experience the presence of God

• Music-centered worship sounds odd to the historian of Christian worship, but it describes a reality in which music is expected to be the means by which worshippers experience God in the worship service

• Word/preaching-centered worship reflects the Preaching Alone pattern of most historic Protestantism and Evangelicalism

• Sacrament-centered worship reflects the Word and Table pattern inherited by the conservative Reformers – Lutherans and Anglicans
So – how does it work in practice?

• Ruth notes that churches on the left hand side of the chart (Anabaptist, Quaker, Frontier, Pentecostal) are more likely to assume that the pattern of worship is the responsibility of the local congregation

• Churches on the right hand side of the chart (Anglican, Lutheran) are more likely to assume that the pattern of worship will be determined by the denomination and delivered to the congregation to follow

• Churches in the center (Reformed, Puritan, Methodist) will exhibit a split with some congregations following the denominational worship resources and some congregations developing their own patterns
So – how does it work in practice?

• Ruth is clear that no church (at least almost no church) worships exclusively with one category (music, preaching, sacrament)

• Most churches worship with some combination of all three though few manage to expect the presence of God through all three (music, preaching, sacrament) to the same degree

• Churches are more likely to try to balance two of the elements than all three

• Churches that try to balance two tend to select from a column next to them – Music-centered may try to balance with Preaching-centered, but not with Sacrament-centered
So – how does it work in practice?

• In particular, where does preaching fit into Ruth’s three categories of worship practice?

• Obviously, in Ruth’s Word/Preaching-centered worship preaching is primary. It represents the goal and climax of every worship service.

• Preachers in churches that are Word/Preaching-centered are expected to have advanced theological education that includes study of the biblical languages and how to preach biblically.

• The sermon and Scripture reading tend to receive the biggest single portion of time in the worship service.
So – how does it work in practice?

• Obviously, in Ruth’s Sacrament/Eucharist-centered worship preaching functions in the way it has always functioned in the Word and Table worship pattern. It is the first climax of the service, but the not the final climax. Its goal is to prepare the way to the Table.

• Preachers in churches that are Sacrament/Eucharist-centered are also expected to have advance theological education, but liturgical theology and practice demand a significant part of the curriculum and requirements in biblical languages tend to be reduced compared to Word/Preaching-centered churches.

• The time given to the sermon is much less than in the other two approaches, though the whole Word section may be longer than the full Table section.
So – how does it work in practice?

• The role of preaching in a church devoted to Music-centered worship is not as clear

• Preaching is usually said to be very important and the sermon comes as the climax of the service, though music may be used to enable the presence of God to successfully convict people following the sermon

• However, the emotional energy of the service climaxes with the music and the preaching often feels like a dull afterthought

• The preacher is expected to facilitate the music-centered worship but rarely is expected to have advanced theological education or skills in working from the biblical languages
So – where is the Church of the Nazarene?

• For most of our history, I believe we have lived on the border between Word/Preaching-centered worship and Music-centered worship

• We seem to be moving (?drifting) deeper into a Music-centered worship approach and thus away from a Word/Preaching-centered worship

• Like churches of the Music-centered worship tradition we do not expect advanced theological education or skills in biblical languages from our preachers, but we do expect them to be able “run a worship service”
So – where is the Church of the Nazarene?

• Like churches of the Music-centered worship approach we assume congregations rather than the denomination will determine the elements and order of individual worship services. We have no Book of Common Prayer, or Book of Worship with suggested liturgies.

• On the other hand, there is small and apparently slowly growing interest in things liturgical by Nazarenes as evidenced by several Word and Table services, increasing use of the Church Year and Lectionary, and groups like “Sacramental Nazarenes”

• Also, the response to the NTS Preacher’s Conference indicates high pastoral interest in preaching.
So –where is the Church of the Nazarene?

• As has so often been the case, the Church of the Nazarene is hard to fit in the categories that describe much of American Protestantism and Evangelicalism

• Historically we wanted our own category – Holiness – but rather than creating our own ethos and practices of worship and preaching we have borrowed bits and pieces from other traditions to guide our worship and shape our preaching

• Sometimes those bits and pieces fit us well and sometimes they don’t

• We have some hard theological work ahead of us if we hope to have a coherent theology and practice of worship and of preaching
Questions for Reflection and Discussion

• How important do we consider the Word of God to be for worship?
• If it is of high importance should we (and if so how can we) incorporate more reading of Scripture into our worship services?
• Do we really regard preaching as an effective means of communicating a message from God to God’s people?
• If so, what are steps we could take to improve the sermon event in our worship services?
• Should a pastor develop a Revelation from God/Response from God’s people understanding of worship, how can that pastor help a congregation to understand that pattern and participate in it?