Mapping a Sermon: An Alternative Model of Homiletic Preparation
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Rooted in the difference between oral and literary orientations, this paper explores another model of sermon preparation based on mapping ideas in sequential and 3D representation, instead of in traditional outline form. It probes the utility of a chart or roadmap to provide a mental map that harnesses and exploits the power of memory, and can free the preacher for "kairos" while preaching.

> He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who
> has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the
> owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom
> new treasures as well as old." Matthew 13

It is almost impossible to function in the western academic tradition without resorting to the outline as a standardized linguistic structure. Books, classes, notes and papers are all outlined, or reduced down the simplest skeletal depiction of ideas or information. This attraction to, and dependence upon, outlines extends from academia to every practical discipline, and is formative in things as diverse as a political speech, a meeting's agenda, and the progression of a wedding ceremony.

The attraction is both universal and understandable. Outlines promise a quick summary of more detailed and complicated information, often serving as a tool to analyze, organize, or critique a given set of ideas. If, as Walter Ong postulates, writing itself restructures consciousness and how we think about information, then outlines might be described as writing on steroids; distilling, condensing, abstracting, and de-contextualizing language even more than its prosaic or poetic cousins. It is hyper-literacy.

As I compose this in prose, I am forced to at least keep a strain of continuous thought between sentences, and to build transitions from idea to idea. I'm also forced to imagine a contextual audience because it is impossible to write for nobody. In outlining this paper earlier, much less precision and context was required. I could throw out thoughts in cryptic, disconnected ways without much attention to audience or reader. The thoughts at that stage were isolated and seemingly discreet units that only later have to be related to each other as the outline is refined and the prose composed.

This convenience of outlining as an organizational and presentational technology explains its near universal status in the world of homiletics. Regardless of homiletic orientations, virtually all preachers, and teachers of preachers, in the evangelical tradition resort to the outline as the commonly accepted homiletic device. Even if an outline is not printed or published, the chances are great that the preacher used an outline as intermediate compositional tool, somewhere between brainstorming and presentation.

Indeed, to craft a sermon without resorting to an outline could be tantamount to negligence at best and heresy at worst (as if Jesus himself ordained the practice).

How Outlines Won The West

That Jesus didn't invent outlines is clear enough to see simply from his rolling and roving narrative style. But if it didn't come from Jesus or Paul, how else did this utilization of outlines in preaching become so commonplace? To answer that would be a long digression, chronicled well in books like Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, Marshal McLuhan's *The Gutenburg Galaxy*, or John O'Banion's *Reorienting Rhetoric: The Dialectic of List and Story*. Sufficient to say, literacy developed gradually as technological innovation to preserve spoken words. For centuries writing was primarily to record and preserve the "already-spoken" word, not to generate new ideas. But as literacy grew, its potential grew beyond mere preservation and it started to take on generative roles. Socrates wrote nothing and was wary of writing. Plato wrote and spoke in dialogues, preserving and privileging the role of speech even as he prepared the way for the kind of thinking that only literacy can support. Aristotle, though still immersed in oral culture began the shift toward literacy as an equal partner with speaking (O'Banion, 1992, p. 48).

Quintilian, the Roman rhetorical theorist during the time of the early church prized both speaking and writing as twin communicative skills. For centuries, right up to the late medieval period, tongue and text worked in overlapping and complementary fashion, the literary accomplishments produced in the context of a highly oral residue. Monks worked diligently to write and preserve classic and sacred texts even though the culture of the monastery was still highly oral.

With the approach of modernity, the elevation of reason and science over faith and tradition propelled the logical, objective, scientific, and literary orientations to prominence. "Once connected with the decline of narration, the history of print reveals much about the decline of rhetoric. For instance, the Anti-Aristotelian movement, of which Ramism was a part, set out to belittle, and then ignore the past which had Christian as well as classical implications. One of these implications is the Western predilection for List [*outline*] which resulted in judgments that the past is filled with errors" (O'Banion, 1992, p. 132). The printing press only fueled this acceleration and proliferation. The old oral groundings of community, tradition, memory, magic, and faith fell on hard times. Increasingly, the ideal for knowledge was framed as free from bias, time and space. The only good knowledge was universal knowledge that could survive with "certainty" and without the need for the tainted subjective world of persuasion called rhetoric.

So literacy carried the day in all aspects of culture including the world of the church. Sola Scriptura reflected the Reformation call away from oral traditions to the supremacy of the written text. Sermons took on a polemic, textual style and were written and read in manuscript form in sharp contrast to the more extemporaneous style of church fathers

like Augustine. Instead being a product of a speaker and a setting, the sermon became disembodied; a "thing" that could stand on its own.

The outline, as an offshoot and extrapolation of literary composition, demonstrates this polemic, cognitive, logical and summary orientation. Points can be condensed down to a few context-free words and related to each other with sanitary precision and brevity. The outline is the essence, the skeleton, the infrastructure. It is "pure" content, unadorned and unadulterated. Eloquence is secondary in outlining because outlines are concerned solely with the transmission of ideas which are prior to, and independent of, a particular expression. This is a conscious shift away from oral and rhetorical roots which regard content, composition, and expression as co-mingled and only hypothetically separable. If the idea of reducing a sermon down to a manuscript is itself a truncation of the oral event, stripping it further down to a few textual phrases seems a miraculously efficient tool to capture information.

So every Tuesday morning thousands upon thousands of preachers approach a blank legal pad and begin sketching out an outline. And every Sunday those same preachers approach a pulpit, outline in hand, ready to work their way through it. Scrawled over and around the outlined points, are hand-written supplements: words that will trigger illustrations, anecdotes, quotes ("breakfast story", "report card" or "Dobson quote"). Though not as substantive as the outlined points, the preacher knows a bone must be thrown to the restless audience whose minds are prone to wander. They are sprinkled in later, like a final dash of spice to a tray of meat.

Before we proceed toward the mapping alternative, a word of caution is in order. Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* contains an entire chapter on outlining including detailed examples of good and bad outlines. It is interesting to note that his examples, in classical style, are pure information, pure content. Illustrations, anecdotes, and analogies and applications are all sprinkled in later, after the content is set. This the follows the modern concept of content first, expression later and leaves "support" material in the inferior, rather than substantive role. But if we think of the way Jesus taught, for example, the parable wasn't the illustration of his point as much as it was the point itself. The story is the point and as such, should "show up" as essential on whatever outline or map is framing the sermon.

Chapell's concern is understandable. "It should be noted that many of the modern challenges to traditional sermon structures result from a redefinition of the preaching task from conveying knowledge of biblical truth to the experiencing of biblical truth" (Chapell, 2005, p. 135). He goes on to point out that every discipline that still values information still uses outlines (law, business, medicine), and that every field that values experience resorts to alternative structures (advertising, politics, entertainment). He point is worth consideration. But let us be clear. Switching to a map instead of an outline does not mean we must change our conception of absolute truth, our use of propositions, our firm reliance on the authoritative sacred text, or our praxis of expositional preaching. The author of this paper preaches expositionally and contextually through the Bible every week. Indeed, dispensing with an outline need not be grounded in postmodern

conceptions of truth and experience, but on pre-modern Greek rhetoric. Classical Greek and Roman rhetoric laid the principles for a grounded, yet spontaneous narrative style before modernity and the printing press brought so much regulation to sermonic structure.

The Mapping Alternative

There is another way. It is not a superior way, or an essential way. This paper will not attempt to dispense with outlines or the literacy that produces them. To do so would be self-defeating since this paper itself is adapted to literacy and will be outlined later as an illustration of the difference. But it will attempt to map out, literally, a way to prepare and present a sermon without the use of an outline. Instead it proposes a sermon map as both an organizational and presentational tool.

Why a map? There are two ways to get driving instructions. One is by means of turn-by-turn instructions. The other is by means of a graphic overview, a map. Some people prefer to read the detailed instructions and follow them. Others prefer to see the whole context spatially and decide for themselves which roads to take and when to turn.
An outline could be likened to turn-by-turn instructions since it is entirely textual. There is only one planned progression through the points and on through to the conclusion. Like written directions, there is no provision for road construction or a detour. The path is decided and encoded in text.

For a mapped sermon, only the starting point and the destination are fixed. A sermon map is more spatially oriented with the starting point, possible pathways, and destination all visible on one page and at the same time. But there are many possible routes depending on actual "traffic" conditions. Homiletically speaking, "actual conditions" include the composition and responsiveness of the audience, the allotted time, elements of worship before or after the sermon, even interruptions (a baby crying or a cell phone going off). With a mapped sermon, the preacher is in full control of the geography of the sermon, and can entertain and implement various options as the situation requires. This is *kairos*."Thus, sensitive to kairos, a speaker or writer takes into account the contingencies of a given place and time, and considers the opportunities within this specific context for words to be effective and appropriate to that moment."
(http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Encompassing%20Terms/kairos.htm)

How to Map a Sermon

Though it is theoretically possible to take a manuscripted or outlined sermon and convert it to a spatial "map", it is more organic to develop the map in the process of preparation, while the sermon is still relatively unstructured and full of possibilities. A major difficulty with preparing entirely in literacy is that sermon ideas go quickly from mind to page without ever being spoken. The organization is done in silence. The outline is produced purely in terms of logical, not verbal progression. So the sermon can be

organized, even "finished" without ever being spoken. Then, after the literate structure is in place, the preacher must, at the last minute, convert the literate structure to an oral environment and "hope it preaches." The odds of successfully making the conversion are directly proportional to the amount of time the preacher spends in oral "pre-hearsal," when fluency and transitions can be test-driven. The more the preacher goes over the outline, the more comfortable the sermon will feel, and the less dependent the preacher will be on the actual outline on paper.

Alternatively, the preacher can actually structure the roadmap of the sermon as it is being spoken. In other words, the speaking drives the structure instead of vice-versa. Instead of becoming addicted to a literate tool which must then be gradually discarded, why not avoid the addiction in the first place? Why not compose a sermon in orality and then map the words that are already fluent?

Let me be clear. This is not dispensing with text in sermon preparation. Texts will always be necessary both as sacred source document, and in literate interpretive tools. But assuming that work is complete, and the preacher has an understanding of the scriptural import (what Haddon Robinson called the exegetical idea), that is where the turn can be consciously made away from pen or keyboard to mouth and ear, toward the production of the homiletical idea and map. (Robinson, 1980, p. 97).

The preacher discovers what he really wants to say by means of speaking. "The simple truth is, we cannot deliver what does lend itself to being delivered" (Shepherd, 2004, p. 124). It is in speaking that we find out what is important to us. When a point is penned on paper, there is no way to determine how much passion is in it because it sits there silently. Indeed, every preacher has experienced the disappointment of finding no motivation whatsoever to preach the words that fell so nicely into the outline. But speaking uncovers passion. If there is nothing that excites while speaking through the exegetical analysis, there is really nothing ready to say. So why not discover that on Wednesday instead of Sunday morning?

The first phase in mapping a sermon is to let our own speech highlight what we want to say. As we talk through the issues in the passage, where do we get emboldened? Where do we get mad? Where are we confused? What analogies come to mind? What stories? What memories? Would a person hearing us talk about it get any sense that we actually think this is important? Crucial?

As we talk, we get possible sermon fodder out of our own words. We can throw those down on a brainstorming page as potential ingredients or "stops" on the journey of our sermon. We are composing while speaking so that the oral element always stays in the forefront. Once we figure out where our passion is, that will be the guts of the sermon. The stories, memories, quotes, analogies become not illustrative material for a cognitive outline, but the very oral structure of the sermon itself. A sermon is not logic coated with story, but story sequenced by logic.

Sequence is important here. In a narrative structure, we cannot just throw out points in rapid-fire, reinforcing succession believing that the more points we have, the more persuasive we will be. Narrative structure relies on a sense of unfolding; that one idea leads to the next. How do we determine sequence? Start speaking. When we speak the fodder on our brainstorming page, our minds will immediately begin to connect them organically. Your mind works in cognitive patterns and as we speak and find natural connections between potential sermon ingredients, our minds learn those patterns and follow a sequence. That is not to say, the sequence will be the same each time. That doesn't matter. What matters is that there is a comfort level with all the ingredients that produces a natural fluency orchestrated by an engaged mind; a mind engaged in that moment. The moment itself, the *kairos* of that moment, is suggesting to the tongue previously rehearsed sermonic ingredients.

The Greeks called these categories *topoi*, literally places to find ingredients for a speech. They not only rehearsed actual speeches, but general lines of argument and generally accepted truths. They worked hard at becoming what we would call conversant so that they could speak on a variety of topics without re-preparing every time. As believers and preachers, we do a sort of this natural preparation all the time, not just when we are studying for a sermon. For instance, the importance of the cross to a preacher should not require repeated extensive preparation. If the cross has ever become more than an abstract concept, if it lives in the experience of the preacher… if the cross truly is important to the preacher, it is not hard to speak with conviction about it, even spontaneously. So while it would be extreme to think no further thought on the cross was necessary, it is also extreme to disqualify from sermon preparation, all that a preacher already knows and believes about the cross.

Cicero and Quintilian both believed a skilled speaker should know almost everything, or at least something on every subject. Preparation was more than utilitarian research for a particular speech, it was a sort of grounding that went with the speaker into every speech event. They prized this sort of extensive, on-call knowledge typical of a well-educated rhetor, and linked it to memory. "Memory, it can be seen has had to do with much more than just memorization. It was a requisite for becoming *peritus dicendi*, well-versed in speaking, something only possible if one had a vast deal of information on hand to be brought forth appropriately and effectively given the circumstances and the audience." (http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Canons/Memory.htm).

This suggests the metaphor of the larder, a place for storing food. As a preacher engages in oral rehearsal of various ingredients, the mental larder is being stocked. Each item in the larder can be spoken with passion and conviction. They reinforce each other and are interrelated. Still, not every item must be used. All the ingredients are potentially available, but only those suggested by *kairos* will be drawn out and served.

Is this a recipe for disaster? Chaotic preaching? It could be if we proceeded no further. This is where the organization of the map assists us. We determine a starting point by simply asking, "What will make other people as interested in this as I am?" Once we have that, we have our hook, our introduction, the starting point on the map. This might

be an ingredient already in the larder, or it might need to be crafted. Then we ask, "How do I want to end? What will drive this home?" Often this is the ingredient in the larder that is our favorite; the one that gets us most emotionally involved, the one that that makes us emphatic. This is our destination.

From there we simply audition various oral pathways from starting point to destination, pulling things from the larder to get the right flow, the right sequence. These ingredients can be a specific implication from the scriptural text itself, from biblical or church history, or something drawn from contemporary life in an anecdotal sense. There is no hierarchy here of ingredients here since content and expression are intertwined and equally valuable and codependent. Since we have never built dependence upon literate prompts, we can now skip going through literate "withdrawal" symptoms (where we can't keep the flow of the sermon going without looking down at outline).

On one level, looking down at an outline seems innocuous. Does it really hurt the ethos of the speaker? Does anybody really expect a person not to sneak a peek at notes? The answer is no. Nobody does expect that. That is why it makes such a difference when we can speak with a mental map and without literate prompts. Because that is the kind of speech people use when they are really comfortable and engaged. Nobody uses an outline to tell the story of their engagement. Nobody uses an outline or notes to remember their first week at college away from home. The things that are really dear to us do not require prompting, as any husband who has forgotten his anniversary knows full well.

So far the roadmap metaphor has been tangible: that is, a real piece of paper with a real sequence of ingredients diagrammed out toward a circled destination. William Shepherd prefers to use what he calls an "oral manuscript" which is basically a sequential outline on paper, but without all the numbers and letters (Shepherd, 2004, p. 120). This kind of paper tool is instrumental in oral rehearsal. But whatever we put on paper does not have to make the trek to the pulpit like an outline typically does. The more a sermon is orally pre-hearsed, the less dependent the preacher is on any memory device, and the more internalized are the sequenced ingredients. Greek orators were trained to visualize the various parts of the actual room they were to speak in and to link physical columns to the parts of their speech. The room itself became a memory device, enabling the speaker to maintain constant eye contact. Most people don't have any problems remembering an introduction and a destination. In the middle, it is not so much memorization as the moment working with memory that composes the sermon.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the difference between an outline and a roadmap go down to the differences between a literate and an oral orientation toward communication. To help flesh out the differences, the two following examples demonstrate the content of this paper in both outline and roadmap forms.

Example A- This Paper Outlined

I. The Predominance of the Outlining
   a. In the academy
   b. In everyday life
II. The Efficiency of Outlining
   a. Decontexualized Knowledge
   b. Literacy on Steroids
   c. Almost Universal Homiletic Utility
III. Brief History of Literacy- How Outlines Won the West
   a. Old Orality: literacy only records the spoken word
   b. Creeping Literacy: starts to be generative
   c. Progression
      i. Socrates- wrote nothing
      ii. Plato- used writing but privileged speaking
      iii. Aristotle- the shift toward literacy starts to tilt
      iv. Quintilian- twin partners
   d. Modernity Accelerates Literacy
      i. Reason over faith
      ii. Discovery over tradition
      iii. Writing over speaking
      iv. Objective proof over subjective persuasion
      v. Literacy over orality
   e. Outline Fosters "Pure" Knowledge
   f. Skeleton of knowledge over "fat" of expression
   g. Chapell's Caution
      i. Alternate structures driven by postmodern truth
      ii. Alternate structures driven by rhetoric
IV. The Mapping Alternative
   a. Not superior, an alternative
   b. The Mapquest Example
      i. People who like turn-by-turn: similar to outline
      ii. People who like the spatial big picture: similar to mapping
   c. Mapping gives more options: kairos, "in the moment"
   d. Mapping allows responsiveness to "actual conditions"
V. How to Map a Sermon
   a. Build the map while you compose
   b. Compose by speaking, after literate research is complete
   c. Invention stage- find out what moves you, passion
      i. Greek sense of topoi- places for arguments or ingredients
      ii. Greek sense of memory- grounded accessible knowledge
   d. Build a larder, stock it full
   e. Start oral sequencing, trial and error
   f. Invent structure

     i. Starting point: why should people care?
     ii. Destination- what is my favorite ingredient?
   g. The importance of eye contact in ethos
   h. Different kinds of maps
     i. Paper map
     ii. Environmental map- suggested by room itself
     iii. Mental "Map"
VI. Conclusion
   a. Example of Outline of Paper
   b. Example of Roadmap of Paper
   c. Ellul's Challenge toward orality

Example B- This Paper Roadmapped
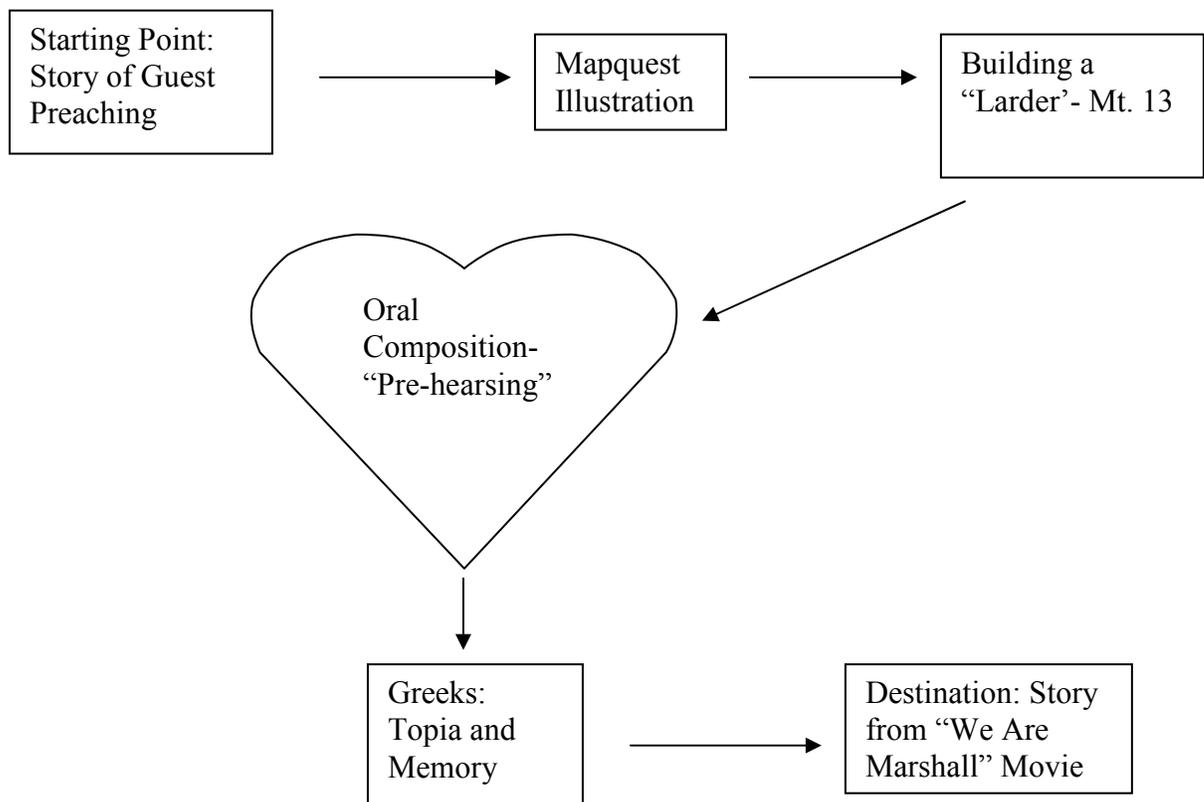
We can see that the map is not an exhaustive or even adequate summary of all the content of the paper. If the entire paper is the larder, it represents an extraction and selection of ingredients appropriate to the oral genre. It says both more and less than its literate sibling. We can see the starting point, the heart of the presentation, the destination, and some illustrative ingredients mixed in. All ingredients are orally sequenced and should flow naturally one into the other. Each "block" as well as the transitions from block to block can be "pre-hearsed" toward fluency. While the he number and location of each block should reflect the inclinations of the individual speaker and as such is only loosely structured, adding more than 6 blocks to a map will push it more and more back toward an outline.

In the end, we are not seeking the abandonment of literacy or literate grounding. We are seeking to reanimate literate structure with a freshness born and expressed best in oral speech genres. As Ellul appropriately concludes:

> The written word is just a mummy whose wrappings must be removed someday—not to discover a few bones, but to breathe life into it again. Only the word conveys the truth of a religious message. What the written word needs is not to be considered as the source of a mere code, law, or formula, or of an indefinitely repeated prayer. It must be taken at its source and given re-birth, not by repetition, but by an inspiration that reopens it. Written language has closed the mind. Like a fist grasping a diamond, it has closed its grammatical and structural trap over a vanishing whisper that it trys to translate through enclosing and containment. But instead, writing snuffs it out, and we must open the straitjacket of writing so that it becomes a freshly spoken word. That way the whisper can be perceived and received again (Ellul, 1985, p. 47).

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