

BRIDGE BUILDING: BEING SENSITIVE IN CROSS-CULTURAL PREACHING

BY

SAMUEL H. LOR

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PROF. BRAD WORDELL, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

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ABSTRACT

How does a minister preach cross-culturally? Can they bridge the culturally divide? What can a preacher implement into his sermon-writing process to help him preach cross-culturally? This paper introduces the approach of bridge-building to aid in cross-cultural preaching. The preacher inhabits the world of the biblical text and the world of his audience. The sermon bridges the gap from the biblical text to the world of his audience. This approach to preaching helps the preacher balance both. This paper also presents practical applications to aid in helping the preacher understand an audience in a cross-cultural setting. This approach and the practical applications were then presented to six pastors in various settings and stages of ministry. Then, the pastors compared their experience to this approach. From this research, the bridge-building approach and various other tools were determined to be useful to preachers in their sermon-writing process.

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1 - INTRODUCTION

In our first meeting, my Bishop Paul Janke had given me three guidelines: Love Jesus. Love the words of Jesus. Love the people for whom Jesus died. These were not just guidelines; They was an approach to being a pastor.

They were tested right away. In that meeting, my Bishop gave me my first sermon text of my vicar year: Ezekiel 33:7-11 (NIV 11)

⁷“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so, hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸When I say to the wicked, ‘You wicked person, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. ⁹But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.

¹⁰ “Son of man, say to the Israelites, ‘This is what you are saying: “Our offense and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?”’

¹¹Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’”

God made the stakes clear to Ezekiel. This was a matter of life and death. God also wanted to the people of Israel to know this truth, so he commissioned Ezekiel as a prophet, a watchman to warn the people. All Christians, especially ministers of the Word, are charged with the same call.

It was a call to love the Word of God. The watchman was expected to *hear* the Word of God and then he was instructed to proclaim this word. Understanding God’s message is the first step. In order to understand, the watchman must be careful to listen, examine and study that

word. Psalm 119:97 displays this attitude: “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”

It was also a call to love the people for whom Christ died. Sinners must know what God has in store for them. In his righteousness, he punishes sin. Those who are walking down a wicked path must be warned, especially those who do not know they are walking down this path. In love for these people, the watchman must sound the alarm so that they may know of their sin, repent, and turn back to the Lord. He preaches the law so that the wayward soul may see their sin.

In love, the preacher must communicate God’s love that is evident in the text. God shows his love for mankind in verse 11. Here, the Lord swears an oath formula to himself. The NIV translates it this way: “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.” (Ezekiel 33:11) The magnitude of this formula is not lost on an Israelite familiar with the oath formula, but how would a preacher communicate this truth in our modern context?

Love for God’s Word compels the minister to communicate this in a way that that shows just how much God loves his people. Love for God’s people compels the minister to communicate this in a way that the people would understand.

During my vicar year, this communication was further complicated by the fact that I served in a congregation that was not my own culture. I grew up in a Hmong family speaking the Hmong language. But I served as a vicar in a rural congregation in a predominantly farming community. What would it require to close that language and culture gap? Would I be able to communicate God’s love to them not just in English but in a way that can be understood in their cultural context?

This paper is an exploration of what I experienced during my Vicar year. It will explore what a preacher can implement into their sermon-writing process to preach cross-culturally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to answer this question, it's necessary to review the basic tenets of a sermon. The goal of a sermon is the proclamation of the Gospel. It is a communication of God's Word. Joel Gerlach defines it as this, "A sermon is the spoken word based on the written Words about the incarnate Word. God uses sermons to bring people into confrontation with the Word. God uses sermons to bring people into confrontation with the Word, the living Lord Jesus Christ. People have needs. God meets needs. A sermon brings the two together, people and God, their needs and his answer."¹ A sermon brings the people closer to God. It bridges the gap between the divine and the human. This is achieved through the Word.

Preacher as a Bridge-Builder

John R. Stott has developed an approach to preaching known as 'bridge-building.' He pictures the preacher as a bridge-builder. There exists a cavern between the biblical world of the text and the modern world of the audience. The preacher must bridge this gap. The preacher starts from God's Word and builds a bridge to the audience. The preacher must build the bridge from text to

1. Joel Gerlach and Richard Balge, *Preach the Gospel: A Textbook for Homiletics*, (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2011), 1

audience. All preachers must engage in bridge-building, especially one who preaches cross-culturally.

Proper use of this approach requires an understanding of both worlds. Love for the words of Jesus and love for the people for whom he died. In order to accomplish this, Stott proposes that a preacher maintain both integrity and sensitivity in his preaching.

Integrity

The preacher has been entrusted with the Word of God. “Preachers are not to invent it; it has been entrusted to them. Therefore, good news has been given to the herald to proclaim, good seed to the farmer to sow and good food to the steward to dispense, while good pasture is available for the shepherd to lead his flock there.”² The preacher must preserve the *integrity* of the message he has been entrusted with. Love for God’s word calls for them accurately represent the text. They represent God and speak the very words of God.

Integrity to the text is accurate communication of the text in a sermon. This means the preacher has correctly exegeted the text and draws the correct meaning from that text. For example, in Ezekiel 33, God focuses on the minister as a ‘watchmen.’ If the preacher ignores the rich metaphor of a ‘watchmen’ and instead writes a sermon on the topic of Marriage from this text, he has misconstrued the text and risks the integrity of the text in his Sermon.

Bridge-building cannot begin until the text is understood. In the sermon writing process, the purpose of a text study is to understand “the integrity” of a particular text. For this reason, the preacher may seek to look at the Greek and Hebrew to gain a better understanding of the text.

2. John R. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 137.

However, there is a distinction between integrity and faithfulness. A preacher can still be faithful if he has misconstrued the integrity of a text. In our example of Ezekiel 33, that particular text called for the use of metaphor of a watchman. If the preacher is not mindful of this metaphor, the preacher is not maintaining the integrity of the text. However, he could very well still be preaching faithfully. If a preacher faithfully preaches Law and Gospel, they are still faithfully carrying out their call as a minister. In this sense, integrity can be understood as the minister's skill of *listening* and *understanding* the text.

For the preacher to communicate effectively cross-culturally, Stott recommends that we begin with the text. Once a solid foundation is laid, the preacher may begin to connect the two different worlds of the text and audience.

Sensitivity

The preacher is a servant of two worlds. He inhabits the world of the text, and he inhabits the world of his listeners. Love for the people for whom Christ died calls for the preacher to be *sensitive* to the audience. "It is because preaching is not exposition only but communication, not just the exegesis of a text but the conveying of a God-given message to living people who need to hear it..."³ A sermon is indeed one-sided communication. It is not an open dialogue between preacher and audience. Therefore, an understanding of those to whom he is preaching is required of the preacher. The preacher's task is to "enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today."⁴ According to Stott, a preacher must

3. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 137.

4. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 138

help the audience answer the question, “What possible relevance can a primitive Palestinian religion have for us?”⁵ Stott calls this *sensitivity*. Sensitivity is the awareness of the particularities of each person or group.⁶

Schmitt sees this as an integral strand of his tapestry of preaching. He calls it “hearer interpretation.” “This is the language of the sermon that depicts and interprets the contemporary life experience of the hearers.”⁷ We help the audience answer the question of Christianity’s relevance to them by helping them see themselves through the eyes of God. But good preaching turns this upon its head. “Yet, hearer interpretation is not revealing how God is relevant to people. Instead, hearer interpretation reveals how people are relevant to God.”⁸ Love for God’s people compels the preacher to show his people that God reveals through the message of the Bible that he truly loves them.

Sensitivity includes how we deliver that message. Sensitivity drives us to communicate this message in a way that the people will understand. The preacher does not change his central message. That message is still Christ crucified for the sins of the world, but he changes the *way* he says it. In other words, the content may not change much, but the form in which he presents the message changes. When preaching cross culturally, the preacher has to be cognizant of his audience’s language, culture, and needs.

The preacher will feel the pull of sensitivity and integrity at the same time. While striving to preserve the integrity of the text, he wants to communicate it in a palatable way to his

5. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 139

6 David J. Hesselgrave, “Sensitivity in preaching wrath and judgment: contextualization of Roland Allen’s ‘full gospel’ for Japanese Buddhists,” *Trinity Journal* 33, no. 2 (2012): 240.

7 David R. Schmitt, “The Tapestry of Preaching,” *Concordia Journal* 37, no. 2 (2011): 119.

8. Schmitt, “The Tapestry of Preaching,” 120

audience. How does a preacher manage the tension of sensitivity and integrity? How does he balance sensitivity and integrity?

Balance

There is a delicate balance between integrity to the biblical text and sensitivity to the audience. The preacher wants to be sensitive to the listeners, meaning he wants to communicate in a way in which they will understand and comprehend. At the same time, he wants to maintain integrity to the text and communicate what this text means. A preacher will feel the tension of both integrity and sensitivity as he writes his sermon. The preachers who correctly balance integrity and sensitivity are communicators who refuse to sacrifice God's truth for relevancy in the world.

However, there is a danger on both sides. If the preacher leans too heavily toward sensitivity, he is in danger of sacrificing the truth of God's Word. Hiebert writes,

“As evangelicals we emphasize knowledge of the Bible, but rarely stop to examine the people and cultures we serve. So, the message we bring is often misunderstood and ‘foreign.’ The liberal wing of the church, on the other hand, has underscored knowledge of contemporary human settings, but downplays the importance of solid theological foundations based on biblical truth. This group is in danger of losing the gospel.”⁹

If he strays too far away from integrity to the side of sensitivity, he risks falling into the danger of losing the Gospel. Stott agrees there is a danger, even if our concern for sensitivity is valid. He says,

“Those who criticize and condemn liberal theologians for their abandonment of historic Christianity, do not always honour their motivation or give them credit for what they are trying to do. The heart of their concern is not destruction but reconstruction. They know that large numbers of their contemporaries are contemptuously dismissive of Christianity, because they find its belief untenable, its formulations archaic and its

9. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 14.

vocabulary meaningless. This fact causes the best liberals profound pain, and it is this which lies behind their theologizing. They are anxious to restate the Christian faith in terms which are intelligible.”¹⁰

In other words, those who stray too far to the side of sensitivity may have good intentions but are in danger of losing the truth. Stott says that though they are eager to communicate what they know, and they want to bridge the divide between text and audience, they have sacrificed truth for relevancy.

“If we acquiesce uncritically in the world’s own self-understanding, we may find ourselves the servants rather of fashion than of God. So, in order to avoid the snare of being a ‘populist’ or a modern false prophet, the type of bridge to be built must be determined more by the biblical revelation than by the *zeitgeist* or spirit of the age.”¹¹

If the pendulum is allowed to swing too far towards sensitivity, our preaching can easily become, “give the people what they want.”

On the other hand, there is a danger to overdoing integrity. If the audience is completely ignored, the preacher risks speaking over the heads of his audience. G. Robert Jacks relates this story of a student who emphasized integrity to the detriment of sensitivity,

“As we watched, I think my responses caromed from disappointment to shock to disbelief. The delivery was dull as stale bread. The content was a hundred percent abstract thought: ‘termpaper-ese’ as difficult for a listener to follow as it was for a speaker to deliver. I can’t even begin to tell you what the sermon was about because there was nothing in it that really touched my world or made me care. It was a dismaying experience.”¹²

This extreme example presented by Jacks demonstrate the audience’s perception of a sermon that falls into the ditch of having no sensitivity. Jack says, “We need to *do* our homework. We don’t

10. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 143

11. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 139

12. Robert G. Jacks. *Just Say the Word: Writing for the Ear* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996),

need to *preach* it. It needs to enrich and inform the word from God that touches our lives in the here and now. God wanted to get through to us and so he became the Incarnate Word. Our words need incarnation. Flesh and blood. Stories. Burrs that grab the socks of our lives as we try to walk with the Lord.”¹³ We must help the audience see the relevance of God’s Word in their lives. The way we relate our message helps toward that end.

Yet, in this balance of integrity and sensitivity, integrity takes priority over sensitivity. Preachers help the audience appreciate God’s Word as more than just archaic and meaningless formulations. They help people ask the right questions. They show the people their need through the law, and then show how God answers that need with the Gospel.

The Preacher’s Own Culture

Stott does not address a major issue. In cross-cultural preaching, a third element should be included in Stott’s paradigm: the culture of the preacher. A preacher is dealing with three different cultures: the culture of the Bible, the culture of his audience and his own culture. He may have our own cultural blind spots. He may even be blinded to what’s in the text. If he sticks too closely to one metaphor for instance, he may lose the richness of the text and thus interfere with the integrity of a text.

Kim calls for us to understand ourselves so that we may better understand our audience.

“In preparation for understanding other cultures, we have allocated indispensable time to learn about ourselves, our experiences, our culture, and our pain. Curt Thompson helps bring our thoughts in this chapter to a close: ‘It is only when we are known that we are positioned to become conduits of love. And it is love that transforms our minds, make forgiveness possible, and weaves a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family... To be known means that you allow your shame and guilt go be exposed—in order for them to be healed.’ Self-exploration for preachers is not a stand-

13. Jacks, *Just Say the Word*, 8.

alone event. As God continues to prune us and heal us, we can take what we have learned about ourselves and begin to apply this cultural intelligence for the cultural contexts to whom we communicate. That is the next step in the journey.”¹⁴

In cross-cultural ministry, it is especially important to understand how your culture affects the way you view other cultures. It is through your own culture that you view the world. Your own worldview colors your view of the text and your audience. In cross cultural preaching, acknowledging the influence of your own culture aids in understanding the different culture of your audience.

Implementation of Bridge-building

Stott’s approach of bridge-building gives the preacher a useful framework for visualizing cross-cultural preaching. The text is the starting point. Once the text is understood the bridge is built to the world of the audience. In other words, this is where the writing of the draft begins. In the writing of this draft the preacher balances integrity to the text and sensitivity to the audience. At the same time, the preacher acknowledges his own cultural bias as he deals with both text and audience. This delicate balance is not an exact science, but very much an art.

So, the preacher must grow in his understanding of integrity and sensitivity. Sensitivity involves understanding people; it involves understanding the way they think and behave. What are some tools a preacher can implement into his sermon-writing process?

14 . Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 61.

3D Gospel

A tool that aids the preacher in balancing integrity and sensitivity is the 3D Gospel. Essentially, Georges examines the gospel from the multiple vantage points found in the world's various cultures. Georges presents a categorization system on how a culture determines morality and 'right or wrong' through reward and punishment. These three separate categories are: guilt/innocence, shame/honor, or fear/power. These forces guide a culture in their thinking. This categorization can be useful to the cross-cultural encouraging preachers to be sensitive to their audience.

First, however, it's important to note the construction of these categories. Guilt and innocence are built by moral codes and law. An individual binds itself to those laws and codes. The Shame/honor paradigm is governed largely by the community. The community determines what's right and what's wrong as a collective. The Fear/Power paradigm is governed by unseen spiritual forces that must be placated in some way. Fear of these spiritual forces drive those in this community align themselves with these spiritual forces for 'power'.

Each culture, however, is not limited to one aspect of these paradigms. Rather all cultures experience these three aspects, but some experience one aspect much more heavily. "Roland Muller says the three dynamics are like three basic colors from which artists create thousands of colors. How much each color is used determines the final type of culture that emerges."¹⁵

The 3D gospel can inform our sensitivity because it provides a glimpse into the way different cultures think. It provides conceptual framework for moralities in each culture. It's often expressed in metaphors. "Each culture type accepts a particular conceptual metaphor as

15. Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame and Fear Cultures* (Coppell: Time Press, 2017), 16.

most plausible. That means the language and values from one area of life (i.e., courtroom, community, or combat) are used as metaphors to organize their worldview and spiritual life. Metaphors use images from this world to explain spiritual realities.”¹⁶

Understanding the worldview of a culture informs our language and approach in preaching. Those from an innocence/guilt culture prefer courtroom language and metaphors. Those from a shame/honor perspective prefer community-based language and metaphors. Those from a fear/power community prefer combat language and metaphors.

Georges calls on us to acknowledge our own cultural bias and move away from it. These blind spots will inevitably lead us to experience or gravitate towards one metaphor of salvation. “But despite the multifaceted nature of Christian salvation, Western Christianity emphasize one aspect of salvation (i.e., forgiveness of sins), thus neglecting other facets of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Imagine a gospel with only one side! For cross-cultural workers, a truncated gospel hinders spirituality, relationships, and ministry. We unintentionally put God in a box, only allowing him to save in one arena.”¹⁷

The Bible sometimes presents the Gospel in all three dimensions. Take for example, Colossians 1:13-14, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” God’s power is highlighted in the fact that he rescued us from the dominion of darkness. God the honors us by bringing us into his very own kingdom, making us his own children and a part of his family. This is a change in status that appeals and speaks to a shame/honor culture. Finally, Christ has redeemed us, namely, he has forgiven our sins. Naturally, this speaks to a guilt-innocence culture.

16. Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 58.

17. Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 13.

Acknowledging the multi-faceted presentation of the Gospel also aids our integrity. If preachers recognize the complexity of the Bible, they can include it in their sermons.

While we acknowledge the multiple dimensions of the Bible, we also must be cautious not to separate the three different concepts. Georges explains, “Examining the gospel from multiple vantage points can help Christians acquire a fuller understanding of the Gospel. Yet, we must remember that the Bible is one narrative in which forgiveness, honor and power are woven together.”¹⁸

Presenting the multiple dimensions of the Gospel to our audience will enrich their understanding of the Gospel. If our audience adheres to one aspect of the Gospel, this does not mean that we should only stick to one method of preaching. To do this would be withholding the whole counsel of God. God’s Word is so broad, so deep, so wide that God presented it to us in so many ways; it is expressed in many different concepts.

The preacher must not stereotype their audience. The preacher must not preach one metaphor consistently to their audience simply because they fall in that particular paradigm. Schmitt calls for the preacher to preach the whole counsel of God. He calls for the preacher to model theological inquiry and teach theological confession. “It offers the fullness of Christian teaching, proclaimed over time.” And teaches the larger understanding of the metanarrative of the Christian faith, a narrative that moves from redemption to the new creation.¹⁹

Furthermore, if the perception of a person is that their guilt, shame or fear is not being addressed, they may bypass God’s grace and default to cultural practices to access that need. Yet,

18. Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 35.

19. Schmitt, “The Tapestry of Preaching,” 114.

the answer to a person's desire for innocence, honor and power is not found in society but in God's Word. Preachers have the privilege and duty to preach God's Word to meet the needs of their audience.

Just Words

Preus presents a Lutheran approach to understanding the different metaphors in the Bible to aid the cross-cultural preacher. In this book, Preus presents all the metaphors for the Gospel. His goal is not to reduce the Gospel to one of its metaphors but to display its fullness.

“Christians often get the idea that to make the Gospel more palatable or exciting we must create new categories, new forms of language, new images that better reflect what's happening in the world. These new categories, insofar as they accurately reflect what Scripture says about God's saving action in Christ, may help to make the Gospel more intelligible. Yet the primary task is not to come up with *new* ways to say the Gospel, but to return to and revitalize the *old* ways to say it.”²⁰

Preus also makes the distinction between the doctrine of Justification and the metaphor of justification. The doctrine of justification is a broad *locus* or categorization under which we hang all the other ideas of justification. In a sense, the doctrine of justification contains all the ways the Bible communicates the Gospel. The doctrine of justification is like a multi-faceted gem. You turn it to one side, and you get a different picture. “Each Gospel word, phrase, and idea is necessary to the fullness of the biblical doctrine of justification. Every Gospel word contributes something distinctive, something unique, which if it were not present, would make the doctrine less than whole, less than fully what the Lord revealed.”²¹

20. Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983), 28.

21. Preus, *Just Words*, 24.

Therefore, in terms of the doctrine, justification is just one of the words that God uses to show us our salvation. “In terms of language, justification is *one* of the words. In terms of doctrine, it contains *all the* words—all the ideas—within itself and cannot be reduced merely to one or two words.”²² In the metaphor of justification, we are transported to a courtroom. God sits as judge, Jesus is the lawyer who mediates for us, and we are on trial for our sins. We might add to that metaphor and say that the devil is the prosecutor. God is the judge who has declared us as righteous; he does not condemn us because Christ has taken our punishment. Through Christ’s righteous acts and deeds, we are declared righteous.

Preus gives the same precaution as Georges: Relying too heavily on one metaphor for the Gospel in our sermons carries some danger. There is the risk of depriving our audience of the full counsel of God. The preach also risks losing the integrity and richness of the text if we import a metaphor that the text did not intend.

Failure to understand and appreciate the fullness of the Gospel has led to errors throughout the history of theology concerning the doctrine of justification. Often culture and context influence church theologians so that they allow a single metaphor to dominate the discussion or interpretation of Christ’s work of salvation. For example, in Luther’s time commercial metaphors dominated. This led to the conception of the Gospel primarily in monetary terms. Therefore, salvation and justification were seen as a transaction. The sale of indulgences is evidence of this abuse. If we take these metaphors too far and we allow the culture and context influence to dominate the Gospel, we risk losing it.

22. Preus, *Just Words*, 23.

Just Words can be used by the preacher to aid integrity and sensitivity. It can help him become aware of the many ways the Bible speaks of the Gospel. It is another tool to help the preacher grasp the integrity of the text. It may also be used to aid the preacher in sensitivity. If the preacher wishes to present the Gospel in a metaphor for a specific cultural context, he may use *Just Words* as a reference.

Practical Applications

A sermon is a monologue, but it shouldn't be one-sided communication. The sermon must flow out of a dialogue. This means that conversation should happen even before the sermon is written to ensure to allow for two-sided communication. Thus, it becomes important for one to listen. Listening earns us the right to speak.

Before and after the service is a great opportunity to do some listening. Furthermore, making visits can open the door for more personal communication. Using a dialogue approach to education in Bible Study also allows for two-sided communication.

This means that if a preacher wants to be able to reach a different culture, the preacher must be in dialogue with that different culture. Matthew Kim offers these four tips to organically interact with other cultures: 1) read books 2) engage in participant-observation by attending events and activities of a particular culture. 3) Conduct focus-group interviews with select group of individuals and culture. 4) spend time with congregants from various contexts.²³

Once cross-cultural dialogue has begun, the preacher must also process the information he has taken in.

23. Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017) 19.

BRIDGE and DIALECT

Matthew Kim offers a model to intentionally contextualize in sermons. He offers the acronyms HABIT, BRIDGE and DIALECT to organize his template. For the purpose of this paper, the HABIT will not be discussed, and only the DIA of DIALECT will be discussed. The BRIDGE and DIALECT methodology asks questions that allows the preacher to build a framework of a culture's way of thinking and worldview and may explain their behavior. Kim does also comment that this BRIDGE acronym may be limiting for certain cultures, and it can and should be adjusted for other cultures. The questions below offer connection points to relate and understand another person's culture.

BRIDGE

BRIDGE is a useful collection of questions for a preacher ask to understand the way people think. Essentially, it's designed to allow the preacher to *listen* in different ways. Again, since preaching is a monologue that flows out of dialogue, the listening happens before the sermon is even preached. It happens on a day-to-day basis and especially during the writing process.

What are their *beliefs*? Beliefs are 'An acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists.' Kim classifies beliefs into three categories: confessional, convictional or cultural. Confessional ideas are beliefs that focus on cognitive ideas which focuses on the intellect. Convictional ideas are beliefs that resemble values and impacts one's behaviors or values. Cultural beliefs are those beliefs that are determined by one's culture.²⁴

24. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 19-20.

What are their *rituals*? a series of actions or type of behavior regularly and invariably followed by someone or by some collective group. They are “powerful tools by which a society sets boundaries, confers status, and marks changes in some state of affairs.”²⁵

What are their *idols*? Idolatry is “imagining and trusting anything to deliver the control, security, significance, satisfaction, and beauty that only the real God can give. It means turning a good thing into an ultimate thing.” Sometimes, these idols may be blind to the person. Thus, it becomes it gives the preacher an opportunity to confront them with the Bible.

What are their *dreams*? Dreams are the goals and aspirations a person has set for themselves. Dreams often shape the personality of the person. Dreams often shape and even guide a person’s life. What is their idea of a good life? Their idea of a good life shapes a person’s worldview. What are their expectations of reaching this goal? “Understanding the dreams or possible selves of our listeners is an all-important first step toward cultural intelligence, because a person’s dreams and possible selves are a reflection of the way culture has shaped their lives and how their past experiences shape their future aspirations.”²⁶ In many ways, a person’s dream forms the identity of the person. The preacher reaffirms their identity in Christ. “In this person’s view, what is the good life? What are their expectations of life?”²⁷

What is their idea of *God*? “What characteristics of God do they emphasize as opposed to others: God’s eternity, jealousy, love, wrath, mercy, patience, justice, holiness, power, goodness, sovereignty, faithfulness, and so much more.”²⁸ Understanding their perception of God will form their theology. This question might also be asked “In this person’s view, what is the

25. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 20.

26. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 22.

28. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 23.

good life? What are their expectations of life? This speaks to what the overarching problem in life is and may even explain their concept of morality. In this sense, this question may show where they fall on the 3D gospel paradigm. Knowing how a person views God also informs how we might shape that perception in our sermons.

What are their *experiences*? Learn to listen to the story of their lives. “The past experiences of the preacher and listener, especially traumatic moments, indwell the person for decades. Every preacher comes to the task of preaching, as well expressed by Henri Nouwen, as ‘wounded healers,’ who then preach to heal other ‘wounded healers.’”²⁹ The experience of a person shapes their lives and may explain their behavior. The simple act of listening to a person’s life will also increase rapport between preacher and congregation member.

DIALECT

The DIALECT deals more so with *language*. Kim purposely uses the term dialect as an analogy for his approach. “When we speak the same dialect as another person, common ground can be established where misunderstandings are reduced and buoyantly eliminated. Using the same analogy to preach using someone’s DIALECT means being intentional in our homiletics so as not to preach generic sermons that we hope will address everyone.”³⁰ So, this part of the Homiletical Template deals with how one presents a message. For the purpose of this essay, only Delivery, Illustrations, Application and Illustration portions will be considered.

29. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 23.

30. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 24.

The *delivery* of your sermon matters. Kim says, “preaching with cultural intelligence invites opportunities for preachers to adjust communication styles and thereby relate to as many cultural groups that worship together as possible.” This means a preacher should consider delivery aspects such as sermon structure, tone, pathos, voice, gestures, rate of speech, and so forth, depending on the cultural context of the listeners.

The use of *illustrations* is an important tool in communicating cross-culturally. “What we take for granted in one culture as an effective illustration may completely miss others from a different cultural situation.”³¹ “...we may even be surprised at how many commonalities we share with the Others, beginning with “a taste for good food, a concern for your families and very often a common Christian faith.”³² Some illustrations are more effective to certain cultures. Understanding which ones are best requires deep understanding. However, they can be very effective in reaching the person.

Most sermons naturally include applications. Are there universal practices for applications? Kim acknowledges that there are no universal practices for application, but he offers three items for consideration when preaching to various culturally different listeners. “First, we want to find a greater balance between individual and corporate applications.”³³ This balance must be addressed every sermon, especially in the American culture is very individualistic. However, many non-American and even biblical societies were collectivistic. These cultures might prefer communal applications.

31. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 25.

32. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 25.

33. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 26.

Secondly, “provide a balance of *being* verses *doing* applications.³⁴ As Georges has already established, shame and honor cultures focus more on the *identity* of a person. Adding more applications of *being* is not only biblical, it adds more variety to preaching. Jesus gives an example when he said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) In the sermon, the preacher can affirm the identity of Christians are branches. Branches naturally produce fruit; Christians will naturally do good works.

Third, “We should not presume a one-to-one correlation of application and implications across all cultures.”³⁵ Take for example the sixth commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.” An improbable conclusion is that you should avoid having lunch with anyone who is not your spouse. In some cultures, this might not be an issue. However, this is a possible implication in the Muslim cultures.

Finally, the goal of language is communication. Thus, it is important to find a common language with your listeners. This includes the use of vocabulary, images, cultural references, idioms, cognates in other languages, and definitions of terms that the listeners will comprehend. If the speaker spends time with his audience, he may naturally catch their language.

While BRIDGE offers different ways of listening, the DIALECT model aids the preacher mostly in his writing and delivery of the sermon. It offers ways to implement what the preacher has gleaned in his understanding of his audience. In this regard, the DIALECT model aids the way a preacher writes his sermons and how he goes about it.

34. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 27.

35. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 27.

General Assumptions

These are general assumptions that a preacher must keep in mind. It's important not to oversimplify. If the preacher considers a person from these three different angles, he will gain a more nuanced understanding of the person and he will also guard against stereotyping a person.

Everyone Shares Characteristics

There are general characteristics all people share. The Bible corroborates this truth. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23) All people are sinners in need of salvation. All people have a conscience that tell them right from wrong. Christ has died for all these people. These are general assumptions that one can make when they are trying to exegete an audience. Furthermore, all people have basic needs that must be met.

"But missionaries, like anthropologists, are also concerned with human universals—what is common to all human beings. Clearly, humans share most physiological functions. They bear offspring, digest food, suffer illnesses, and respond to stimuli by the same biological processes. They experience joy and pain and share many of the same psychological drives. They organize societies and create cultures. Without such human universals, it would be impossible for people in one culture to understand or common humanity with other people is the first step in building the relationship of love and trust that can bridge the deep differences that separate 'us' from 'them.'"³⁶

This common ground between all human beings is a good place to start when in the initial stages of a relationship. Sharing these similarities and being cognizant of them is also an easy way to relate to the audience in a sermon.

³⁶ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 22.

Every person is unique

While all people are the same, every person is unique in their own ways. They have their own troubles, their own set of circumstances that require attention. For example, one member struggles with cancer. Another member struggles with addiction. These are all different circumstances that are unique to each member. Like a physician, the preacher must pay attention and hear these people as individuals.

Every person is like some others

We might say that every person sees themselves as part of some tribe. They see themselves as sharing similar characteristics of this tribe. Care must be taken not to stereotype these members. Rather, it is important to *listen* to how they describe themselves and what characteristics they ascribe to themselves. In this regard, some structure may be taken from the 3D Gospel and from the anthropological and sociological fields of study.

“Finally, a culture is ‘shared by a group of people.’ It summarizes the beliefs, symbols, and products of a society. Humans are social creatures and dependent upon one another for survival and meaningful existence... All human relationships require a large measure of shared understandings between people. They need a common language, whether verbal or nonverbal, a shared set of expectations of one another, and some consensus of beliefs for communication to take place. In other words, they must share to some extent in a common culture.”³⁷

Understanding a person’s particular role in their community might be useful as well. Are they a leader? Is there any tension? Are they an outcast? These questions may answer how firmly a person holds onto the values of their community.

In summary, the preacher inhabits both the world of the biblical text and the text of his audience. The sermon bridges the gap from the world of the text to the world of his audience.

37. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 51.

The preacher wants to maintain balance between integrity to the text and sensitivity to his audience. A third element the preacher must deal with is his own culture. Essentially, he deals with three cultures at once: the culture of the text, the culture of his audience and his own culture. Thus, listening become incredibly important for the preacher. He must intentionally listen to the text and to his audience.

2 – METHODOLOGY

Having conducted a review of the literature, I needed to know if my thesis was valid. Thus, I created an interview based on my literature review. The literature review helped me write my questionnaire. The questionnaire was limited to questions based on ‘sensitivity’. I operated based on the assumption that because of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod’s (WELS) educational system, their pastoral candidates and pastors are generally good at preserving the integrity of a text. The questions, then, were aimed at how a preacher grows in sensitivity.

Six pastors were interviewed. These pastors are in various stages of their ministry and are in various mission settings. Tim Walsh, serving in Long Island, NY, just started his ministry. Dan Witte has been in the ministry since 1992 and is currently serving as a missionary and professor in Zambia. These pastors are in different settings. Nate Bourman and Pete Leyrer serves in urban Milwaukee. Paul Biedenbender serves in downtown Denver. Robert Wendland was a missionary to Malawi and currently serves as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. All of the participants are pastors or missionaries of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

My interview is a semi-structured in-depth interview. I largely followed the interview process from Total Quality Framework.³⁸ I asked the interviewees to compare their experience to my research, specifically the bridge-building approach.³⁹

38. Total Quality Framework.

39. See Appendix A for my interview questions.

Prior to the interview, I provided the participants an interview handout which summarized parts of my literature review and introduced terms which were pertinent to the interview. See Appendix B for interview handout.

Before and after each interview, I recorded an entry into my reflexive journal. Before my interview, I answered the questions: “How do I expect the interviewee to answer these questions?” and “What are my assumptions?” After the interview, I answered the question, “Have I distorted the information the information gathered?” and “How did the participants’ questions compare to my expectations?”

I contacted the participants through email and if possible, tried to interview them in person. I conducted three interviews in person (Wendland, Leyrer, and Bourman) and three on Zoom (Witte, Walsh and Biedenbender).

I recorded the interviews. The in-person interviews were recorded on my phone⁴⁰, and I used Zoom’s recording function for the Zoom interviews. I provided a consent form to each participant. For those on Zoom, I recorded the reading of the consent form and the recorded their response to the consent form.

Once I finished my recordings, I used otter.ai/home to transcribe the recordings of the interview. Then I looked for common themes to each question.

Themes

The first themes deal with cross-cultural outreach and trying to understand other cultures. The second set of themes deal with cross-cultural preaching.

40. My interview with Wendland was not recorded. There were technical issues. However, I took notes of the interview. The information from Wendland comes from my notes.

Listen

It has been established that listening is very important in building a relationship and rapport with the congregation. What are some practical ways to listen? Bourman notes that “We just don’t listen to each other anymore.” A preacher should try to “Listen so that you can speak in a way that is understood and, in a way that you’re not misunderstood.” Bourman noted that empathy can be used as a way of understanding. “Listen in so you can hear their pain.”

Walsh employed a passive role in conversations so that it offers him a chance to listen. “And be present in the conversation, be a participant. Take a seat back and just have both ears open to the both of them, like how do they talk? Like what do they say? How does it work? The nuts and bolts of discourse for New Yorkers. What is that? ... You got hang out where people from the culture are talking to one another. And you are not required to actively, necessarily, constantly be interacting. Where you can just take a fairly passive role and really soak in and listen.” This passive role allows him to observe the body language and unspoken rules of a particular culture.

Walsh also offered some practical advice on places that offer an opportunity to get to know your audience. Fellowship time after church, joining the Chamber of Commerce, or even during dates with the wife. Listening to the everyday speech and jargon of the people of Long Island will aid in the writing and delivery of his sermons.

Walsh offered encouragement to WELS members in particular to engage others through listening. In our ever-changing society, this skill will become even more important. “We’ve got to understand how to talk to people who we’re not talking to, who we are literally not talking to right now. Like people who we don’t know yet. And if we don’t know how to talk contextually

and dialogue, and learn and listen, that goal is going nowhere. We can't even plant missions in Wisconsin, if we can't do that anymore. Because everywhere is changed... We can still be a conservative, but we got to listen, we got to understand where other people are coming from. We got to be ready to just shut their mouths for a little while. And hear how other people think."

Walsh notes that due to our rapidly shifting culture in America, most preachers, will inevitably find themselves dealing across cultures. Therefore, listening skills are absolutely crucial to carrying out this cross-culture ministry.

When Biedenbender first arrived in Denver, he had many ideas about the direction of the church. However, he admitted that he now listens before he acts. "The biggest thing I've learned is to grow in (your weakness) and embrace them and really ask God to grant me the grace to carry out is to remember to always start with questions, not answers... being taught and learning to listen first, like, alright, what should we do? What do you think I should do? And to just take the time to learn to understand before going anywhere. And then also, yeah, the patience with understanding the difference... saying, you know it's going to be different and it's going to be okay." So, listening is not only important to do before writing a sermon, but also all aspects of ministry. The preacher hoping to preach cross-culturally will never stop listening.

A preacher is not alone in his attempt to listen. One way he can listen is to seek a cultural guide.

A Cultural Guide

Many of the participants commented that if you're dealing with a different culture, it is absolutely necessary to have a cultural guide to show you around. Wendland agreed that you must "have an informant." Witte found a cultural guide to be useful to distinguish between the

various tribes of Zambia and Kenya: “Ok, well, these Kenyans are not Bantus. Even the Kenyan guys explain to me, ‘Well, we’re more like these guys in Zambia. But those guys are not like those guys in these ways.’”

When Leyer served in Taiwan, he employed an office administrator to help him with his sermons. He would dictate to this guide, who would write this down. This allowed the sermon writing process to be more efficient and quicker. The guide would also help him with his mandarin.

In his current location in Milwaukee, Leyer has a guide for the African American community who he often runs ideas past. This cultural guide also helps him avoid sensitive topics and illustrations, especially historical illustrations. This guide notes that African Americans and white Americans often interpret history from a different perspective.

Leyrer also noted that it was helpful to have ‘guides’ who are not on your side. “Those who are not on your side they definitely very sharply call you out for the dumb and insensitive things that you’ve said.” This criticism provided a perspective outside of the church and was useful to spot blind spots.

Tim Walsh asked a member of his church who was a former Catholic. “When I finished writing my first draft of my reformation sermon, I was looking at it over and I thought, yeah, I’m talking a lot about Catholicism, and etc. I don’t know what it’s like from the inside, though. I haven’t been there. So I called her and I said, ‘Can I read a chunk of my sermon to you right now?’ And just have your react to it and tell me, like, either ‘yeah that’s on or that’s pretty good but let me say it this way, or like, no that’s not like, I don’t think that reflect.’ So I just read it to her.” This Catholic member prevented him from setting up a strawman argument against Catholics.

Biedenbender finds his wife as a helpful guide to Hispanic culture. “So that’s a big advantage to ask what makes sense to my saying this. There are just sometimes where I don’t want to be the ignorant guy saying something that’s actually offensive without knowing it. Just bouncing things off.”

Implicit in having a guide is acknowledging your own cultural bias and limitations. You can never fully become a different culture, thus, learning never stops. The interviewers recognized that they would never truly become the culture that they’re working. There would always be more to learn. The learning never stops. Leyrer provided an interesting principle. Witte says, “I’ll never become an African. I have too much background to completely become African.” Wendland says that a learning mindset is good to adopt. “I’m still learning. I’m never a master. Your mindset is that you’re always observing. Everything is an opportunity.” Biedenbender also sees his ignorance as an opportunity to learn, “Yeah, you disagree, respect, honor... that’s an area where I can grow. And I’m glad that somebody else shared that with me and want to learn more about that. Yeah, so those are all again, opportunities to build relationships...”

Leyrer speaks against the idea that you can simply learn everything through books, “I’ve read a couple of books, so I kind of know everything there is to know. And, you know, and then finding out that, that I don’t and, that’s where, I’d say, I probably had, have had in the past, and still do today, some African American friends that are probably more willing to tell me what I don’t get.”

Recognizing the culture gap between himself and the people of Long Island, Walsh believes in authenticity to oneself. “So, one of my core principles is just don’t try and be too fake about it. Don’t try and pass yourself off as an insider if you’re not actually an insider.

Contextualization isn't about you becoming an insider necessarily, it's about you communicating as an outsider with an insider." Biedenbender also supports a measure of authenticity to avoid cultural pitfalls. "But still remember who you are, and don't fall into the trap of cultural appropriation, and all of a sudden, just take things for yourself. That's not going to work. That's not who you are. You don't have the background in the experiences, you know, those shared struggles to be able to claim that for yourself. And so, you know still making sure that you're not crossing a line that's inappropriate when it comes to appreciating and embracing other cultures."

Assumptions made with pride can lead to stereotypes. Witte warns about this. He says, don't employ this attitude. "Oh, I know how those Africans think. Then you fool yourself. Stereotype 58 countries, 3700 people groups or at least the ones that WELS works with."

While, one may never truly become a different culture, Leyrer notes that he certainly gained something. He relates a story from another missionary: "You guys are 100% American; you do everything like Americans do. After a while in Taiwan, you're going to lose about 25% about what it means to be American. But you'll gain back about 50% of what it means to be Taiwanese. And so, you will become 125%... You become culturally fat."

Be willing to try and be willing to fail

When one ventures into the unknown, mistakes are bound to happen. This is definitely true of cross-cultural ministry. One has to expect mistakes. When dealing with another culture, Wendland says "be willing to try and be willing to fail." Leyrer employs this policy to new experiences, especially when it comes to food: "Don't automatically say no. To the uncomfortable experiences... Eat first and ask questions later."

Bourman notes that even when you ‘fail’ in another culture, you still communicate that you care. “I want to communicate by my attempt, at least that you’re important to me, that your language and what you talk about, and what you know, is really important to me... But I tried because I want to communicate that you are important to me.”

Bourman and Biedenbender notes that this attitude extends to the pulpit too. Bourman says, “Personally, you can make a lot of mistakes in the pulpit. You can say the wrong things. But if your people know that you love them, and you care about them. They’re going forgive you.” Biedenbender says, “Again, I thank God for the 16 years of being able to know a lot of people and that you know, if (my sermons) do get out of whack, either way, thank God for the credibility that they show your grace back to you. And you can have a conversation later about those things.” This comfortability in the pulpit is a result of a good relationship with their members.

In cross-cultural interactions, Tim, again values authenticity. “But sometimes, I just come at an interaction and kind of be unapologetically Tim. Like I’m not a New Yorker, I don’t know how to do it, so I’m just going to come at you and see what reaction that provokes you know, when I walk over... You just run in to a wall and see where it buckles.”

Avoid Making assumptions about a culture.

A number of the interviewers work inside the U.S. They note that the U.S. is very diverse. For this reason, one can’t make broad assumptions about it. When Witte moved to New Ulm from Suburban Florida, he experienced a cultural adjustment. “And it sure helped, that I had already been in some different cultural situations in America. Because it’s the strangest cultural adjustment I ever had before I came here, to move to Minnesota.”

Walsh described the culture in Long Island as a ‘salad bowl.’ “There’s pockets of different cultures. There’s places where it’s more of a pocket of a different ethnic background, or different cultural backgrounds and there’s places where things are maybe a little more mixed through.”

In Downtown Denver, Biedenbender found that the hardest group to relate to were actually members of his own ethnicity. This demonstrates the growing diversity of America. “One of the hardest cultures for me to work with and understand are the white young people that live downtown. I don’t get it. And to just connect and to understand what the connection is going to look like.” This highlights the truth that differences between groups of people go beyond ethnicity and can also be political, socio-economic, and religious beliefs.

Recognizing Your Own Culture

Witte reflected on his experience at St. Marcus. From a chance encounter while canvassing, Witte became aware of the race struggles in America. “I didn’t understand what it means to be white until I hung around St. Marcus... I’m attending a half African-American, half white church on the near Northside of Milwaukee and Rodney King riots are going on in LA. And it’s not safe for me to be walking around at night. And I canvassed happily for VBS. And I knock on doors. One of my favorite things was the lady looking at me because I’m just walking down the street handing out VBS flyers, like 1989 or something. And I say “hi” to an African American lady. She turns around about 15 feet later and she says, “You lost?” because I’m so pale.” He notes that even now, as he’s serving in Africa, he is still learning. “So, I’m learning culture along the way, but I don’t really learn what it’s like to be an American until you move out of America.”

Walsh recognized that being in a different culture exposes your own cultural blind spots. “Versus if you’re staying in the culture, the environment in which you grew up in, you don’t see the ways that your Christianity should, could kind of bump heads with that. Whereas when you move somewhere, you immediately kind of see like, oh, that I wouldn’t want to do that. This and sometimes it’s just a little bit of cultural chauvinism: “I’m from the Midwest and we wouldn’t do it that way.”

Wendland saw himself as a third-culture kid. His parents were missionaries to Africa, so he was born in Africa. However, his family retained American roots and traditions. Even after he graduated from the seminary and returned to Africa as a missionary, he found himself in a third culture again. His wife was born and raised in America so she maintained many American traditions. Wendland, however, sees his third-culture experience as an advantage. He never truly felt ‘at home’ in the American nor in Malawi. In both cultures, he had to learn to adapt to the dominant culture. This has naturally allowed him to be comfortable in other cultures and helped him develop cross-cultural skills.

When the preacher comes to know his own culture better, he will be in a better position to recognize how his own culture affects his worldview and perception of other cultures. This will inevitably allow him to better understand other cultures because he begins to understand what shapes his own thinking and how that differs from the people with whom he’s working with.

Format of the Sermon is flexible

All of these pastors employ different formatting for their sermons, but they all agree that the sermon has to flow from the text. Walsh favors expositional preaching but with an orientation towards the audience. “Let the text guide you... I, again, want to be unapologetically Tim. I’m

kind of an expository guy. Like, I want to, I'm going to just lay out this whole text thing for you." "I suppose I'm trying to stick in the middle there. I think that it's important to try and lean toward, and again, this maybe comes out of my integrity or my expository approach. I probably lean a little more toward textual integrity... (I did this) because I thought that's what the text was telling us to do, like, be conscious, you know, it wasn't a text that said, 'You're a damn dirty rotten sinner.'" "If you're integral to the text, you will often you may end up preaching a sermon that's a little more third use of the law."

Both Witte and Bourman preach more of an inductive style of preaching. Witte prefers to structure his sermons around pictures. "I'm becoming much more of a fan of going from problem to solution, going inductively as opposed to deductively. And I'm really glad that someone taught me to preach deductively."

Bourman preaches in an inductive style. He found that he has shifted from a content focused preacher to a listener focused preacher. "What are they hearing? Instead of: what am I saying? Evoke worship and praise in the hearts of God's people. Use narrative structure... experience the text and lead them to, in their own hearts to be thankful, to worship and praise.

"Instead of a Telic note, I write, 'What is the goal of my sermon? Like, what am I hoping to accomplish through this sermon? Of course, the Holy Spirit will do what he wants to do with it. But what do I hope to accomplish in this sermon?'"

He provides an example from his Thanksgiving sermon: "So for Thanksgiving, my goal was, I want to evoke worship and praise in the hearts of God's people. And I tried to use the narrative structure."

Therefore, the formatting and structure of the sermon doesn't matter too much. The preacher may use a deductive, inductive or whichever approach. The message of the Bible may

be communicated effectively across cultures if one shows the audience that they have a love for both God's Word and for God's people.

While the interviewees had various formatting for their sermons, many of the participants agree that illustrations and examples were effective to use in sermons. However, the illustrations must be familiar to your audience. Witte says, "You just got to always think about what people have experienced... maybe no one has been in Jerusalem, but people know where the airport is." Witte says that people tend to remember word pictures in any culture.

Witte cited a good example he recently heard. "Whereas the congregation Pastor started out talking about his own wedding started out talking about his own wedding because he was preaching last Sunday about the parable of the 10 virgins. And did he have people by starting to talk about his own wedding, which had taken place in that very room. And it started with the ringing of a bell, and his bride was late. And so, he was doing the parable of the ten virgins in his own version, but he had people laughing and listening and right away by talking about something they could understand and they had experienced."

Wendland encourages to "Preach into their culture, not just their language." He notes that communication goes beyond culture. "Contextualization is maybe not conscious. Sometimes it's more caught than taught."

Leyer had already noted that he used a cultural guide to help him with his illustrations. He also believes that vocabulary is important. You want to use the vocabulary that your audience is familiar with. You also want to be sensitive about the emotion certain words evoke. Again, a cultural guide can help in this regard.

Walsh often uses examples of things that people are familiar with, like landmarks. "You've got to try and learn what's here. So, the other day, I preached one point on Jesus, and I

forget what the text is, but it's Jesus' argument with the Pharisees over the Sabbath regulations. And I was talking about some of the Rabbinic Sabbath day regulation stuff. Our area used to not be as much, but there's still quite a heavy Jewish presence, I used to be very thorough Jewish. And so if you drive like seven minutes up the road, there's a road, kind of a weird triangular road called 'Sabbath Day Path.' And it's called that because you can walk it on the Sabbath day and not break the rabbinical prohibition on work.... That's contextualization right there. That's Acts 17, Paul quoting the poets of the Athenians." Walsh doesn't use examples from history. He believes in "showing the people that you're walking around and seeing the world that they see... I mean the thing that I talked about being out in the community, that's also important, but I'm talking to your people and understanding what's going on with them and their struggles in there." Using landmarks like these are not only familiar to your audience, it shows that you understand and care about their lives.

Witte echoes the sentiment that preachers should not quote history too much. "Don't quote civil war history, especially if your audience isn't American." If you quote history too much, you run the risk of speaking past your audience. If your audience are not familiar with an event in history, you may not connect with the audience at all. Conversely, the preacher may spend too much time setting up historical context simply for the sake of an illustration.

Biedenbender warns against language specific idioms. "Vicars always use – "The Grass is always greener... you must spend your whole time just trying to explain a cliché that was easily understood by using that one little phrase and in another you have to define it another way." However, Biedenbender notes that in his multicultural setting, sometimes metaphors from one culture can be used to allow both sides to grow. For example, a specific tradition from the

Hispanic culture might be referenced to help the English congregation grow in their understanding.

Biedenbender prefers using illustrations or examples that come from a shared experience. “You know, we’re on the east side. People from the east side they know that you’re going to have Blacks, Hispanics and whites all rolling together... (Focus on what brings us together)... it’s usually food, restaurants and establishments that have been around the neighborhood forever that everybody’s eaten, and everybody knows. You know what their favorite food is there, and so we talk about burrito’s at this place, and there’s a Chinese restaurant where, it’s a 1.50 a scoop. A place where everyone stops in there for some good lunch... Our neighborhood has gone through a lot of changes. It’s getting gentrified at a rapid speed. And, again, I’m blessed. Our church is blessed to have been here, since before all that happened. And so which gives us I guess, in a sense, some street cred in the community with the other long-timers... You’re somebody who’s been here when it was rough and tough and end up sticking around and still representing the hood in that way.”

Biedenbender notes the history of the church within the community provides common ground. “It’s not a strange thing in our neighborhood in Denver to have everybody living side by side, and then going to church side by side either... It’s not a strange thing for all these cultures to be coexisting. But the challenge then for the pastor’s preaching is using that culture of our neighborhood and understanding it, and being able to refer to it, and you know again, being able to live here for 16 years. To know everything that’s going on and know a lot of the people who have been here for 40 years, and the elders in the community and all that. Just be able to know them, learn from them.

Along with illustrations, pictures and stories communicate well across cultures. Witte encourages using Hebrew word pictures. If they are used, the preacher should explain them. This is all part of the communication of the text. Witte also believes in using stories, “I love stories. Everybody likes stories. God wired us for stories.” Bourman echoes the sentiment “It’s like across cultures and across things, narrative, almost always communicates really, really well.” Biedenbender notes that some illustrations are less effective cross culturally. “Make sure that the illustrations are going to make sense to your group of mostly immigrants from Latin America. Yeah, there’s some things that they aren’t just it’s not going to land, like talking about basketball or something. They know what basketball is in the English service... (but not in the Spanish service) so there’s some illustrations that you have to make sure are going to make sense with each audience.”

As Biedenbender has grown as a preacher, he finds himself using more illustrations and pictures. “There’s more illustration these days than there has been in the past as I’ve grown as a preaching. A lot more storytelling. That’s probably the biggest thing as far as my listeners and I don’t know if that’s specific to cross-cultural preaching though. That’s just kind of something that I’ve learned homiletically over the years. We’re back to storytelling and that’s how listeners are engaged for the most part across cultures.”

Don’t avoid tragedies and the issues that are affecting your congregation. Some of the participants encourage tapping into the experiences of your congregation. Don’t avoid the issues that they’re wrestling with. “But you got to connect with them. What are they are thinking about?” Witte also noted the tragedy of a woman who owned a convenience store in the neighborhood being robbed. He says, “I may not be able to put it into this sermon, but maybe the sermon after that.”

Bourman notes that empathy and care should be expressed when dealing with these issues. “That helps me and so when I preached during those days, like I preach the Sunday after George Floyd and I just don’t know what you’re experiencing, but I see you, I see that you’re hurting... I care about you.”

When a member was shot, Biedenbender didn’t avoid it but used it as an opportunity to bring the congregation together. “To an extent, the differences don’t matter. (And) We all kind of know (that) too. We all bonded over him. (When he got shot) We’re getting shot. All those things don’t matter.” This event was something that impact all the members of the church personally. Addressing the issue head on showed that he understood what his congregation was thinking and feeling.

However, at the same time, Biedenbender believes some issues don’t belong in a sermon. “There are some things that I am very careful that I hardly ever even touch in a sermon. Just because I just feel it’s much more appropriate to do that where it is a two-way conversation where somebody can react and then I can react to their reaction, and we can go back and forth. Unless I say something that is taken in the wrong way, and they can’t react. Or they react in a different way on Monday in an email. And you’re just not going to go there. If it’s something that’s a very pressing issue, we’ll set up a meeting and go and talk about it.” For example, some stories might violate a person’s privacy or are just too personal. Some things might be too controversial.

3 – CONCLUSION

In this paper I have introduced an approach to cross-cultural preaching. This approach of bridge-building balances integrity to the biblical text and sensitivity to the audience. It's an approach that intentionally addresses the divide between text and audience.

The *3D Gospel* and *Just Words* are used as tools to further supplement this bridge-building approach. Matthew Kim's book, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence* offers lots of practical tips to engage a culture in dialogue and gives a framework to understand that dialogue. All these tools supplement a preacher's understanding of the integrity of the text and aids in *sensitivity* by helping the preacher understand the audience. With these tools, the preacher can is well equipped to preach cross-culturally.

The preacher can adopt this approach in a cross-cultural setting or preaching in general. The applications gathered are useful in helping a preacher better understand his congregation.

In conclusion, what does it require to close that language and culture gap? It requires that the preacher be intentional. It requires listening and understanding both the text and audience. Furthermore, it requires delicately balancing integrity and sensitivity as the preacher builds a bridge from text to audience. He writes his sermon as a monologue knowing that it flows from his understanding and relationship with his audience. At the same time, the preacher acknowledges his own cultural bias and how that affects the writing of his sermon.

In my vicar year, I was able to communicate God's love to the people of St. Martin's not just in English but in a way that can be understood in their cultural context. Returning to my sermon in Ezekiel 33, through my Bishop's guidance and God's grace, I stumbled into a way to translate this. In my own Hmong language, there was a particular term that I could use in my

own Hmong language to communicate the Hebrew oath formula. One could say, “I promise to the earth and the heavens.” It communicated a strong promise, almost a binding promise. It was a merism: two extremes of a spectrum are indicated to represent the whole. Essentially, one was saying, “I am promising to everything in between the earth and the heavens. Let them be my witness.” This was the highest form of a promise one could make in the Hmong language.

An equivalent concept of the oath formula can be found in American culture. One of the highest and most binding oaths one can take is in the court of Law. With hand over a Bible, those who testify in court must swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Using this example allowed me to translate not just the language but also the meaning of God’s oath. It allowed me to be *sensitive* to my audience. Thus, in my sermon I wrote: “In Ezekiel 33:11, God takes an oath. And it’s as if he were in court, testifying, with a hand on a Bible, and he swears to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He testifies emphatically and clearly, that he wants you to live.”

During my own vicar year, this intentional step to communicate more clearly to my audience set the tone for my own sermon preparation; I aimed to be sensitive in every sermon without knowledge of Stott’s bridge-building approach. However, having now been introduced to this approach and having the tools provided by this paper, I hope to become even better at balancing integrity and sensitivity. This paper will also aid other preachers at maintaining sensitivity and integrity in their own sermons, so that they become better watchmen, able to communicate God’s love from his text to the world of his audience.

For Future Reference

There are many areas open for future research. Does the WELS lean more towards sensitivity or integrity? How does the WELS pastoral education prepare its students for sensitivity?

Furthermore, what the weaknesses of the bridge-building approach? How does the bridge-building approach accommodate different sermon structures?

APPENDIX A

Interview Template

(Based on BOX 3.5 pg. 81-82 of “Applied Qualitative Research Design”)

Before and after each interview, I will record an entry into my reflexive journal. Before the interview, I will answer the question, “How do I expect the interviewee to answer these questions?” “What are my assumptions?” After the interview, I will answer the question, “Have I distorted the information gathered?” “How did the participants’ questions compare to my expectations?”

This first document outlines the questions I will ask the participants. The second document “Interview Handout” will be given to my participants prior to the interview to review.

Introduction (5 mins)

I introduce myself and explain the general purpose of the interview: See handout. I also ask the participant’s permission to take notes and record the session (whether on zoom or audio). Give the participant the opportunity to ask for further clarifications as to purpose, etc.

- I. Background of Minister and their cross-culture population (15 mins)
 - a. “First, I’m interested in understanding a little bit about your culture, and then the culture you work with.”
 - i. How would you describe your own culture?
 - ii. What culture do you work with?

- II. Understanding Audience, Exegeting Audience (20 mins)
 - a. “Since you are working with a different culture. There inherently exists a culture divide or gap which must be bridged. My next questions are geared towards understanding this process.”
 - i. What are your core principles when it comes to cross-cultural ministry?
 - ii. What are some practical things you do to achieve understanding?

- III. Sermon-writing (20 mins)
 - a. “As a pastor, one of the primary ways you minister to your congregation is through the sermon. We might describe the sermon as one large exercise of contextualization. Now, I’d like to know how you go about communicating this.”

- i. Do you write a separate sermon?
 - ii. How do you contextualize your sermons?
 - iii. How do you balance integrity and sensitivity in your sermons?
 - iv. How do you structure your sermon?
- b. Mention Matthew Kim's HABIT, BRIDGE, HABIT – *It is one template in which we might use to intentionally include contextualization in our Sermons. Discuss it as the conversation allows, particularly BRIDGE. Does it line up with their process? How does it look in a Lutheran setting?*
- i. Historical, Grammatical, and Literary Context
 - ii. Author's Cultural Context
 - iii. Big Idea of the Text
 - iv. Interpret your Context
 - v. Theological Presuppositions
 - vi. Beliefs
 - vii. Rituals
 - viii. Idols
 - ix. Dreams
 - x. God
 - xi. Experiences
 - xii. Delivery
 - xiii. Illustrations
 - xiv. Application
 - xv. Language
 - xvi. Embrace
 - xvii. Content
 - xviii. Trust

APPENDIX 2

Interview – Summary of Research

This document is intended to 1) provide an introduction to the purpose of this interview, 2) a summary of my research thus far, and 3) an introduction of the terms I will use.

A preacher is servant to both the text (Integrity) and their audience (Sensitivity). My thesis will explore the relationship of Integrity and Sensitivity in a Sermon and how a preacher balances these two aspects. I want to explore how that balance is tested when a preacher is preaching cross-culturally.

Finding balance between these is important for a preacher. If sensitivity to our audience is lost, the message might be misunderstood as ‘foreign.’ If we lose the integrity to the text, we are in danger of losing the Gospel. At the same time, integrity always takes priority over sensitivity. (Note the distinction between ‘integrity’ and ‘faithfulness’)

I believe we do a great job of teaching exegesis of the text and maintaining integrity. However, sensitivity is often taught ‘on the job.’ The purpose of this interview is to gain a rich and nuanced understanding of 1) the ‘thinking’ or process by which parish pastors and missionaries understand and familiarize themselves with congregants of a different culture, and 2) how this difference in culture affects the way they communicate in their sermons.

Principles for effective Cross-cultural Understanding

These are principles I have gathered from my research to help one ‘exegete their listeners.’

1. The most important thing to remember is to *listen*.
2. Everyone is the same – All people are the same to some degree. The Bible supports this truth. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23) Yet God reconciled the world to himself through Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. All people have a conscience that distinguishes between right and wrong. All people have basic needs (Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs). These are general assumptions that one can make.
3. Everyone is unique – Every person is unique in their own ways. They have their own sets of troubles and circumstances.
4. Some people are the same – Every person sees themselves as part of some tribe or community. This particular community will have some influence on the values and behaviors of its individuals. Care must be taken not to stereotype. Rather, it is important to *listen* to how they describe themselves and what characteristics they ascribe to themselves.
 - a. For this purpose, 3D Gospel gives some framework for us to understand how different cultures view Morality. Where do they place themselves on the 3D Gospel paradigm? (Shame/Honor-Guilt/Innocence-Fear/Power <http://theculturetest.com/>)
 - b. For this reason, might some metaphors of Justification simply speak better to a culture? For example, forensic justice in the Western Culture. (cf Just Words)
 - c. It’s also important to note their relationship with their ascribed community. Are there any tensions? Do they consider themselves an outcast? Are they a leader in the community?

5. Overriding questions: These questions get to the core of their values and allegiances, which will affect their behaviors – feelings, and systems of knowledge, logic and wisdom.
 - a. What is the good life?
 - b. What are their expectations of life?
 - c. What is THE problem?

6. Practical things to effect Cross-Cultural dialogue.
 - a. Make visits.
 - b. BEFORE and AFTER service is an opportune time to get to know the members.
 - c. Have a dialogue education approach to Bible Study – Again, this offers an opportunity to *listen*. If the pastor is lecturing and doing all the talking in Bible class, students might not have an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, or express their faith, struggles, and hope with their own words. (in other words, the instructor will have less opportunity to listen.)

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