SHAKING OF THE FOUNDATION(ALISM):
PREACHING IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT
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I. Introduction: From Augustine to "How to Rhyme Stuff"[*]

St. Augustine, commenting upon the role of preaching and teaching in the Church, writes: "But in all utterances they [Christian teachers and preachers] should first of all seek to speak so that they may be understood. . . ."[1] Augustine then adds, "He who teaches should thus avoid all words which do not teach."[2] This striving for clear teaching of Scripture among those who proclaim the message of Scripture vocationally is ongoing. The desire reflects not only the urging of Augustine toward contextual clarity (Augustine mentions that preachers and teachers should pay careful attention to both the context of the text and the hearer), but also reminds all Christians of the struggle that proclaiming the message of ancient documents to ever-changing social contexts entails. This is perhaps best illustrated with a recent cartoon depicting a clergy person sitting in an office filled with classic and contemporary works of theology, many degrees and societal memberships on the wall, piles of Bibles and commentaries on the desk in front of him, all the while peering intently into a book titled, *How to Rhyme Stuff*. Attempts to connect to a postmodern culture that by definition has rejected the notion of a "big story" (metanarrative) or of the foundation of reason (rationalism) has often reduced Christian preaching to catchy phrases, inspirational monologues about "success," or random experiments in communication theory.

Christian preaching is more than this, however. Preaching is a key function for ordained and licensed vocational church leaders both Catholic and Protestant (see 2 Timothy 4:2, in which Paul commands young Timothy to "preach the Word"). And for Protestant ministers, in the words of Gaylord Noyce, our most distinctive "professional role" is found in the preaching office: "They are ministers of the Word."[3] Given the fact that, in the words of preaching professor Al Fasol, preachers speak "the equivalent of several medium-sized volumes every year", in an environment where best-selling authors are expected by their publishers to produce a quality volume every three to five years, the creativity, freshness, and cultural acumen required for such a task is challenging to say the least.[4]

This paper seeks to address the role of proclaiming ancient texts in a contemporary setting, taking seriously the movements of postmodernity as well as post-foundationalist theological shifts, and the responses to these in regard to proclamation. Detailed analysis of these concerns are impossible here, but trends in both theology and preaching will be introduced and will include an examination of how Wesleyans in particular can encounter and negotiate these trends from the pulpits of their churches.

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[*] Presented at the 45th Annual Wesleyan Theological Society Meeting, Azusa Pacific University (California), March 6, 2010.

[1] St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1981 edition), VIII.22.

[2] Ibid., X.24.

[3] Gaylord Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 67.

[4] Cf. Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching: An Introduction to Basic Sermon Preparation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 9.

II. Postmodern Turns and Post-Foundational Challenges to Preaching

The proclamation of truth as a propositional set of texts in Scripture has been a foundational mark of Evangelical theology from its earliest days.[5] The fundamental idea of Foundationalism, according to Stanley Grenz, "is that certain beliefs anchor other beliefs. . . ."[6] He goes on to describe Foundationalism as a means of establishing "truth" by constructing an edifice built upon what many Enlightenment thinkers called "an unassailable foundation of basic beliefs."[7] The shift away from a strong assertion that truth can be constructed and adequately understood in this way is what Kevin Vanhoozer has called the "postmodern turn."[8]   Vanhoozer describes a variety of turns away from modernity in arts, culture, philosophy, theology, and biblical studies.[9]   Like Grenz, Vanhoozer sees a rejection of foundationalism's proclamation of "come let us reason together" on the basis of shared logical categories, because in postmodernity, reason is "a contextual and relative affair."[10] This rejection means that *reason* (or truth) is (in Vanhoozer's description) "always *situated* within particular narratives, traditions, institutions, and practices."   And this "situatedness" determines or "*conditions* what people deem rational."[11] Postmodernity, then, in the words of Charles Allen, reminds us of "the relativity of all human thinking and acting."   Or, more specifically (again according to Allen), to be postmodern is to "be suspicious of, and uncomfortable with, words like 'truth,' 'reality,' 'objectivity,' 'reason,' 'experience,' 'universality,' [and] 'absoluteness.'"[12] To be postmodern, then, is to embrace a post-foundationalist way of thinking: no "sure foundation" or unique foundation for truth is to be assumed. There is a questioning of the "inherent goodness of knowledge", and indeed knowledge itself is uncertain, because it cannot be "erected on some sort of bedrock of indubitable first principles," in the words of Millard Erickson.[13]   And while, as Keith Putt reminds, there are not necessarily an infinite number of truths or interpretations, there is a strong openness to more than one possible meaning of virtually any text – even biblical texts.[14]   Indeed, the interpretations of the preacher in postmodernity must be "judged in the marketplace of alternative explanations."[15]

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[5] Cf., Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 34-35; and 88-89.

[6] Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 200.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

[9] Ibid. 6-9.

[10] Ibid. 10.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Quoted in Ronald Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 9-10.

[13] *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 18.

[14] B. Keith Putt, "Preunderstanding and the Hermeneutical Spiral," in S. Corley, Steve Lempke, and G. Lovejoy, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 211.

[15] Ibid., 212.

A post-foundationalist ethos reminds us that instead of a dogged "line" of truth stretching from one set Cartesian linear point to another precise point, there is more of a "spiral" – a "hermeneutical spiral," as Putt insists – in which the Spirit (through the preacher and the Community of Faith), uses a kind of "creative uncertainty" that Jesus hints at in John 3:8, in which he describes the Spirit as "blowing where it will."   In this process, our pre-understandings are taken seriously as we seek to share the story of God, facilitate interpretation, and allow the Spirit to move the ancient Story of God into the realms of new meaning, new truth, and new life for those whose stories are seeking a common connection with God and others.[16]   This is the kind of contribution that the works of Gadamer, Riccouer, and other philosophers of postmodernity have made in our approaching any given text (even Scripture) from the perspective that proper communication is (in Gadamer's words) a "fusing of horizons" between the "story" of the text and the stories of those who hear, interpret, and apply the meanings in their own lives.[17]

So, the sermon preached on Sunday mornings in most congregations does not immediately – at least in the context of post-foundationalist postmodernity – strike a majority of the hearers as "the Word of the Lord" simply because certain texts are used.   What, then, are we to do as people who for centuries have relied upon Enlightenment ideals of "reason" and "truth" to grant authority to our exposition of Scripture?   A hint may be found in Christopher Bryan's suggestion that the Church, even prior to the Enlightenment, continues to remind itself of "the story," often called the *regula fidei* ("rule of faith"), or (in Greek), the *kerygma*.   Bryan writes, ". . .the church insists that we remind ourselves of it [the story] by regularly rehearsing it in outline in the creeds."[18] He adds: "Whenever we begin to feel confused or lost, it is to the foundational story itself, the story of God's faithfulness that we must return.   By studying it and claiming it as ours, we remind ourselves of who and whose we are."[19]

Here, in this assertion that points us toward the ancient, "pre-modern" avenues, we gain clues about addressing a postmodern (rejection of the "big, over-arching story" or metanarrative) and post-foundationalist (rejection of the objectivity of reason) climate in which we preach.   By heeding these clues, the Church and those who proclaim the message of Scripture therein allow a fresh and bold telling and re-telling of their story in a manner that places it in the marketplace of ideas with other stories.   And while an essential part of the Christian story is indeed an embrace of a "meta-narrative" (namely, God's desire for eternal fellowship with God's creation) and a "foundation" (the revelation of God's self and plan to humankind), this story can be shared in a manner that allows the story and its recipients to speak for themselves through the proclamation, which in its rightful place, becomes another of many key parts of the liturgy of the Church.   We now turn to ways in which others have taken this approach to proclamation in a post-foundational context seriously.

III. The Preacher as Postmodern Storyteller

According to Darius Salter, "If postmodernity is a triumph of mystery over logic, impression over rationale, aesthetic creation over empirical demonstration, and transformative symbolism over print-based

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[16] Cf., Putt, 213.

[17] Cf., Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 2nd Revised edition, trans. by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 304-305.

[18] Christopher Bryan, *And God Spoke: The Authority of the Bible for the Church Today* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2002), 13.

[19] Ibid.

discourse, preaching in the 21st century should have a heyday. . . ."[20] The reason for this, he adds, is that Scripture, which is filled with symbol and image, solves the problem of postmodernity's and post-foundationalism's "deep distrust of the Enlightenment emphasis on rationality."[21]

It is not, of course, that the Bible is "unreasonable." Rather, it is that the Bible itself does not rely wholly upon the tools of Enlightenment communication to get its point across. This is so because the Bible is indeed a story: it is the story of God's desire to have a people despite the fact that many have chosen otherwise. The preacher, then, approaches the texts of Scripture not as means of "functional utility"– how to be a more positive thinker, more perceptive parent, more astute financial manager, or even a better scientist or historian – but rather, as a means of integrating the story that the people of God have learned and incorporated into their own lives especially in regard to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.[22] We have been reminded in what has been dubbed a "post-literate" culture[23], that there is a movement toward symbols and experiences and away from truth as a literary construct told from an edifice of collected "truths."

However, the good news of post-foundationalism is that it gives every story – even the story of the God of the Bible – the opportunity to lay a foundation, which for Christians is the foundational story of a God who wishes to be in relationship with those whom God has created, and has provided the means by which we are to do so. These means include Scriptural revelation, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Sacraments, and the stories of the Community of Faith past and present. Whereas Enlightenment challenges the place of spiritual narratives in the realm of "hard reason," postmodernity embraces the value of all stories and gives room for these stories to hold relatively equal sway in culture. Preaching, then, becomes a means of verbally conveying what it means to *be* the Church, to learn the "language", and to tell the "big story" (meta-narrative) within the context of the little stories associated with it. What cues, then, do we have in regard to preaching in such a context and to such a people (recognizing that there is no "purely" Enlightenment or post-Enlightenment/postmodern congregation or person for that matter)? As we examine the role of the preacher and his or her preaching, we pick up clues from pre-modern times and ways that assist us in a clearer, more connective proclamation that seems to strike a poetic (though not always rhyming) note with hearers who either question or are unaware of the very foundations many of us in Christian ministry hold dear.

IV. A Rhyme to the Reason: The Role of the Preacher in Postmodernity

In his book on pastoral theology, William Willimon describes and critiques perceived roles of the pastor in contemporary life. His images include media mogul, politician, therapist, manager, and

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[20] Darius Salter, *Preaching as Art* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2008), 22.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Salter suggests that such "functional utility" kinds of approaches to preaching may make good fireside chats at Cub Scout gatherings, but not good Christian sermons! Cf., *Preaching as Art*, 22. I would add that using the Bible simply in this way bypasses Scripture's big story and assumes that the hearers of the sermon are on the same Enlightenment-oriented page of seeing the Bible as *the* foundation, when they have not yet encountered God or the story God is trying to tell!

[23] Cf. Chris Hedges, *The Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation Books, 2009).

activist.[24] One of these models is, of course, "preacher." Given the current state of affairs in culture, Willimon states, "I sense a return to the pastor as preacher as a guiding metaphor of ministry."[25] However, this metaphor is only effective, according to Willimon, if the pastor/preacher engages in "priestly listening", where the sermon is part of the act of corporate worship in a gathered congregation, and the preacher listens to the text of Scripture "on behalf of the congregation" as the preacher engages the stories of the congregation in every day life.[26] The preacher is ultimately called to articulate the mysterious story of a transcendent God who comes near to creation through a person: the person of Jesus Christ, who is called the "Word made flesh" (cf., John 1:14). As African-American scholar Michael Eric Dyson (a religion professor and an ordained Baptist minister) remarks, all good preaching can and should "tell the story," but not simply in a redundant fashion. Examining the preaching style of the great African-American pulpiteer Gardner Taylor, Dyson notes that Taylor himself says that good preaching has to have many of the same elements as a well-written novel: descriptive power, as well as a wide view of humanity without losing its link to individual characters.[27] Preachers are entrusted to tell the story of God, but how? No longer can preachers say, "Thus says the Lord," and expect immediate obedience based upon an agreed set of foundational authorities. Even John Wesley preaching in the heart of the Enlightenment Era, often lamented that even though his preaching has a long history in some areas (like Pembrokeshire, for example), places where there were ". . .no regular societies, no discipline, nor order or connexion" produced the consequence that ". . .nine in ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever."[28] The preacher, then, becomes a megaphone (microphone) telling the story of God in a way that intersects with the stories of others, taking seriously the fulness of the biblical stories, so that the gospel story can shine through.

Therefore, the role of the preacher is not simply to "tell a good story" based upon what he or she perceives to be universally accepted foundations (although we as Christians believe that such foundations exist); rather, more specifically, the preacher is responsible for facilitating the telling of the story within the community of faith in ways that include but are not limited to the proclamation on Sunday mornings. Otherwise, the result becomes, according to Wesley (who quotes Sir John Suckling): "Verses, smooth and soft as cream, / In which was neither depth nor stream."[29] Preaching is "telling the story", or rather facilitating the telling and sharing of the story of God, with hopes that the "big story" (meta-narrative), which Christians define as the work of God through Jesus Christ, connects with the stories of those who encounter the words, community, and symbols of the Christian faith. We say that the Bible is "true," then, in the sense that (in Willimon's words) "the Bible's way of narrating the world is truthful."[30] This kind of focus in the preaching ministry allows the gospel – the story of God – to permeate the gathering of believers in the context of the liturgy of the Church.

This way, instead of moving from abstract principles that leave many out of the conversation right way, we can begin with the God who is experienced in Jesus Christ, in the New Testament, and in the

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[24] Cf., *Pastor: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 56-74.

[25] Ibid., 66.

[26] Ibid., 67.

[27] Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 52.

[28] *Works*, III:134.

[29] *Works*: XI: 489.

[30] *Pastor,* 120.

liturgy of the Church, as a way of moving from the hearer toward the bigger story.   From the Enlightenment idea of "understanding seeking faith," we turn again to the more ancient Augustinian/Anselmian call of "faith seeking understanding."   Our belief in the story of God expressed through the stories of God's interactions with God's people and lived out in Community.   This approach is in contrast to the idea of reaching "down" to the hearer from the already sizable edifice and scattering among the ignorant seeds that represent portions of the big story.   Moving toward the big story by connecting with the stories of the listeners, the stories of our culture, and the stories God tells through the means mentioned above (e.g., the text, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the liturgy, etc.), will allow truth to be encountered ("felt"), while taking seriously the ramifications of the possibility (in the mind of those new to the gospel of Jesus) of an over-arching meta-narrative from which these encounters flow.   What shifting emphases, then, can we briefly delineate to assist us in the postmodern preaching journey?   A few are listed as we conclude.

A. From "Understand" to "Feel"

The contemporary prophetic pop voices of the group U2 and their exuberant lead singer Bono recently codified much of postmodern thinking with their song that begs, "Give me something I can feel."[31]   In the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral (a phrase coined by Wesley scholar Albert Outler), experience has a place alongside Scripture (revelation), reason, and tradition.   However, as Randy Maddox reminds, it is only relatively late interpreters of Wesley who have taken more seriously the role of experience in Wesley's theology.[32] Wesley gives us cues regarding the importance of experience, particular in the idea of the "witness of the Spirit" for assurance of salvation.   Experience, of course, was not (nor should it be) the sole or primary evidence for doctrine (as Maddox reminds)[33]; however, experience is not to be overlooked by proclaimers of the gospel in a postmodern, post-foundationalist context.   A preacher who continually emphasizes the need to "understand" what is being said, may be implicitly drawing from resources not available to the postmodern hearer.   Of course, we must understand Scripture before it can be applied.   However, the Enlightenment goal of greater understanding producing a close encounter with God has been questioned and (in light of history and experience) is questionable.   The goal of liturgy has not been simply greater understanding of God, but also of greater experience of God individually and corporately.   Preaching as part of the *liturgias* (the "work of the people") implies shared stories to be understood, but also shared experiences to be undertaken. In contrasting the "modern" and postmodern/emerging church, Dan Kimball notes that in modernity, the sermon is "the focal point of the worship service."   However, in churches that are making in-roads in contemporary, postmodern settings, the sermon is "one part of the experience of the worship gathering."[34] This was true by necessity in "pre-modern", largely non-literate settings.   Now, in a "post-literate" post-foundationalist culture, this is true by choice for preachers who wish to adequately teach Scripture.

B. From Individual to Community

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[31] U2, "Vertigo", from the album *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, 2004.

[32] Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 44.

[33] Ibid., 45.

[34] Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 175.

The Bible is a community document.   Making the biblical story a "love letter to you (individually) from God" misses the greater point of the text itself.   It further skewers the meanings and applications of the great doctrines of the Church that have emerged in the context of Community.[35]   The preacher's sermons become ways of building community – of teaching individuals how to become part of the community of God.   This means learning the culture and language of the Kingdom of God while being aware of and even fluent in the language of the culture (which is dire need of redirection).

Duke ethicist Stanley Hauerwas notes in an article in *The Christian Century* that becoming a true disciple can be compared to his father's (and his, for a while) profession of bricklaying.   Bricklaying, says Hauerwas, is not only a skill that requires consistent repetition, but it also requires learning a language.   This language "forms, and is formed by" the skills developed in consistently laying brick.[36] Terms like "frogging mud," which means creating a trench for the mortar in such a way that creates a vacuum when the brick is placed in the trench, are not just incidental to bricklaying, but (according to Hauerwas) "intrinsic to the practice."   He adds: "You cannot learn to lay brick without learning to talk 'right'."[37]

Similarly, the preacher's sermons, alongside the other elements of liturgy, allow the community to learn to "talk right," in the sense that the preacher works with the congregation through the sermons to help articulate the real meaning of the Christian faith.   Terms like "faith", "success," "servanthood," and "love," are all terms that have various meanings in various settings outside the context of the Church. However, in the context of the Kingdom of God lived out in the community of faith, these terms have essential "Christian" meanings, and it is these meanings we learn as we draw from the biblical narratives. Even the term "life," which is often seen as an individualistic concept having to do with breathing, eating, containing carbon, and even having some sort of "freedom," has a distinctively communal concept when spoken of in terms of the scriptural narrative.   God creates Adam *and* Eve and places them in a particular community in which the entire ecosystem is interdependent.   Human beings are given the task of helping build a true community that reflects God and God's ways, according to Scripture (e.g., Gen. 3).

So, the preacher uses "community language."   Sermons that reflect this language not only connect with a postmodern ethos, but also adequately reflect Scripture's emphasis upon community, which when recaptured in post-Enlightenment Christianity, can provide ample opportunities to draw non-believers to Christ through the community of faith.

Leonard Sweet describes this postmodern turn toward community using Starbucks Coffee Company as a metaphor.   In his book, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, Sweet recognizes that Starbucks does not seek simply to create a cup of coffee, but an experience.   This experience has to do with community: a place that shares a common language ("tall" instead of "small", for instance, in regard to coffee sizes), common themes, and a common place of gathering to further the community.   As a community, we have learned to "speak" Starbucks, because we have accepted the "story", the experience,

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[35] This idea is the key concept of Stan Grenz's systematic theology entitled (appropriately) *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

[36] Stanley Hauerwas, "Discipleship as a Craft, Church as a Disciplined Community" *The Christian Century,* October 1, 1991 (pp. 881-884), 883.

[37] Ibid.

and the invitation to join in.[38]   Even if we make a mistake in our order (saying something in the wrong order), we are lovingly "corrected": a non-whip, tall, mocha, non-fat; becomes a "tall, non-whip, non-fat, mocha."   This consistent repetition of the "liturgy" of Starbucks teaches the "language," which helps build community.   In the church, the community of faith, the preacher becomes the facilitator of this kind of community-building.

C. From Solved Equation to Exploration of Mystery

The obsession of modernity with solving problems is evident in sermons that seek to wrap God and God's story up neatly every time, inviting listeners to "understand" God and then "use" what we learn about God to assist in some seemingly positive result: greater riches, happiness, self-esteem, etc.   All of these things are certainly positive goals of preaching, but they are not the only goals of the biblical narrative.   The Book of Job, for example, reminds us that some mysteries of God's providence will elude us, since God is bigger than we can conceive.   We cannot always have the answers, and indeed in Job, it is those with the answers who are chided (and almost wiped out) by God.   This does not mean that the Bible contains no answers, but rather, that the Bible invites us to move beyond simple answers and into the complex nature of God and God's mysterious story of love toward those who have disobeyed and strayed from God's purposes.

Biblical scholar and preacher Walter Bruggemann writes that preachers in postmodernity must realize that: "We now know (or think we know) that human transformation (the way people change) does not happen through didacticism or through excessive certitude but through the playful entertainment of another scripting of reality that may subvert the old given text and its interpretation and lead to the embrace of an alternative text and its redescription of reality."[39]   This means that in letting the uncomfortable and challenging mysteries of the text surround and penetrate the listener, ethical turning points are able to emerge more clearly, albeit more slowly at times.

D. From Three Points to Main Point

Contemporary preaching specialists like Calvin Miller remind us of the risks of imposing the "three points and a poem" approach to a text of Scripture.   There is little about simple precept preaching that holds an audience, Miller states.   For once the precepts have been stated, "their force is spent."[40] The sermon as a simple utilitarian tool (e.g., a tool that seeks to promote happiness or ease by applying principles gleaned from the text) can miss the bigger picture of the story of God and God's desire for a relationship in which the recipient discovers and interacts with a mysterious God who reveals His love and calls for trust through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Sermons that are only about the practical things of this world," according to Miller, are often "too bound by this world" to help the hearers.[41]   Miller advocates and practices a narrative sermon style that is deeply rooted in the

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[38] Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2007), 66.

[39] Walter Bruggemann, "Preaching as Reimagination" *Theology Today* Vol. 52:3, October 1995
        (313-339), 319.

[40] Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 42.

[41] Miller, 32.

transcendent (mysterious) as a way of then pulling the hearers toward God.[42]   The usefulness of this model for a post-foundationalist culture is not in the method of "one-point" preaching, but rather, in the emphasis upon the "main thrust" of the story being told, without unduly stretching the story into some pragmatic document that it is not intended to be.

One may find ways of being a great husband or a better employee in a Scripture passage like Ephesians 5,   but one must not miss the importance of the deeper meaning – the main point – of the story expressed in the text itself: "This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church," according to Paul (Eph. 5:32).

V. Conclusions: Don't Always Conclude

Preaching that connects to a culture that has left or is in the process of leaving behind the notion of absolute truth and that often fears that foundationalism is simply another word for exercising power over those oppressed, recognizes that the last "amen" of the sermon does not exactly conclude the sermon. Nor does it conclude the many discussions that will be spoken about and lived out in the community of faith, which daily encounters competing community narratives.   Bruggemann reminds in regard to this that now more than ever we must realize that there are no "textless worlds": everyone carries a text or sermon with him or her as they enter and as they leave the sanctuary.[43] We must then allow the liturgy in which we as preachers participate (and for which we are responsible in leading congregations) assist us in telling and re-telling the story of God and allow the Spirit to weave this into the stories of our hearers. This means, too, that we leave room for dialogue with the text and for interrogation by the Spirit who inspired the text.   This ongoing dialogue is not the exercise of intellectual pursuit that characterizes modernity, but rather, like the story of Jonah, it is a story with an open ending, leaving room for application of the story of God in the everyday lives of both preacher and the recipient of the sermon.[44]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Walter Bruggemann, "Preaching as Reimagination," 316.

[44] Here I am reminded of an often-told Tony Campolo story in which his "ideal altar call" does not occur with people coming forward, but with people leaving out the back door to apply the works of service they have been challenged to in the message.