



HELPING CHURCH LEADERS TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

Number 117 • February 15, 1999

PREACHING IN TODAY'S CULTURE

Last week, the Beeson Institute for Advanced Church Leadership hosted its seventh training module on the theme of "Culture, Worship and Preaching." One of the presenters was author/pastor/professor/communicator Calvin Miller, and in an interview with the editor of NetFax following his remarks, he commented on preaching in today's culture. The following are excerpts from the interview.

NetFax: *How has preaching changed over the years...we are now in a visual age, a very different culture?*

Miller: It is more about how people listen than how preachers preach. Preaching ought to be determined by how people listen and so I talk about things like making the "communicator's promise"...every night Peter Jennings tells me what he is going to tell me in the next thirty minutes. Preachers need to be up front with people...why they are getting together, what the sermon is going to be about.

NetFax: *What about the influence of the electronic culture and the power of story?*

Miller: Yes, people are used to images but good storytellers pay less attention to the sound byte rules. Since we are a story soaked culture, to preach in any other way is just not going to attract people.

NetFax: *How does a preacher go about discerning the audience?*

Miller: This is a day and age when you really need to think about and study to whom you are speaking. The hardest work I do is always audience analysis...trying to look at those people and figure out who they are before I am in front of them. What do I need to say? In my books, I call it the "speech before the speech"...when I am introducing myself, when we are making friends...before I actually begin to speak.

NetFax: *How is the skill set for communicating in today's culture different than in the past ten or fifteen years?*

Miller: I started pastoring in Omaha in 1966 and during those 26 years in the church I visually watched the culture change. Boomers got older, Buster were raging and on the scene. I watched people's favorite kind of music change during those years. In 1991, everyone under 42 said rock was their favorite kind of music and that would not have been true in 1966. I watched the entire world change in terms of what it listened to and how it listened. We are a "dumbed-down" society...American is now #14 in reading skills...and I try to remember that. Today, we are more visual. I try to understand the importance of metaphor, language and story. Dialogue is really important now. People don't come to church to hear a sermon—they come to react.

NetFax: *What themes are particularly appropriate for today's culture?*

Miller: I believe the big themes are always theological...Dorothy Sayers said "the doctrine is the dance" and Ian Watson said, "the what of our preaching is more important than the how." I believe doctrine is exciting...Jesus saves...He rose...these are great themes and things people want to hear about. The question is how to make them attractive. There is what I call the pyramid of priorities...truth, interest and inspiration.

NetFax: *Where do you see preaching headed in the future?*

Miller: Authentic preaching is going to be as it has always been, wrapped up in Jesus Christ and meeting needs. It's how you take all the individual "ones" that comprise 3,000 people and pull them into "one." What do they need to hear that will change and touch them, make them more like Christ? Very few people come to church to find out whatever really happened to the Hittites. They are not interested in information but in relationship and having their needs met.

For audiotapes of the module on "Culture, Worship and Preaching" or more information on the Beeson Institute for Advanced Church Leadership, call 888-523-3766. See also Calvin Miller's book, *Marketplace Preaching* (Baker, 1995, 616-676-9185).

***If you encounter any problems with the transmission of NetFax, please call 1-800-495-5203.
At the prompt, enter your fax number and request document #5001.***



LEADERSHIP NETWORK
TEL: 1.800.765.5323 • FAX: 214.969.9392
WWW.LEADNET.ORG

© Leadership Network 1999