

## Column

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic life has not been the same, including for those who worship regularly. Not too long ago that meant getting up on Sunday morning, dressing, driving to a physical house of worship, occupying a pew for an hour or so and perhaps engaging in in-person fellowship afterwards.

This is no longer necessarily the case. Now many – especially those living in heavily populated areas rife with the virus – are apt to worship on-line with no physical contact from people outside their own household. One thing, however, has not changed. Sermons continue to be delivered.

Some are good; others, mediocre; and still others, downright dreadful. Nevertheless, preaching persists.

Much responsibility falls on the preacher. Sermons should challenge and stir the congregation to faith and action by bringing the eternal truths found in the Bible down to life in the present. To be relevant, the preacher must always be crossing the bridge between the ancient world and the modern world, to quote John Stott.

If those who give sermons have a responsibility, so do those who hear them. There are, in fact, some things a person can do to get more out of sermons. They include:

-- Believe God has something to say to you. Many things divert the listener's attention away from the message of the sermon, including the preacher's voice, manner or style of delivery. One's own pre-occupations with work, family or what's for lunch may also raise a barrier. Nevertheless, every effort should be made not to let such things interfere with receiving God's message. A spirit of expectation must be maintained.

-- Work out at least one point or thought to take away. Usually, in sermons there is an over-arching theme with a few sub-points. The Holy Spirit will often point out different things to different people. Let this divine Person do His work in your life.

-- Turn the point of the sermon into a prayer and a commitment. The primary thought should not be whether I enjoyed (or did not enjoy) what the

preacher had to say, but rather, what am I going to do about it. Pray for wisdom and strength to carry out what the Holy Spirit has revealed to you.

-- Talk over what the preacher had to say with others. If you are listening via the Internet, this may be members of your own household. If you have children, be sure to involve them in the conversation. In so doing, the message of the sermon will be clarified and strengthened.

In Mark 1:14, we read that "Jesus came preaching." Preaching is of singular importance, pandemic or no pandemic. By it, the faithful are strengthened, while the indifferent are stirred to commitment. Both those who preach and those who listen must be active participants. Resolve to do your part!

*Almighty God, who pourest out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and of supplication; Deliver us, when we draw nigh to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with stedfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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