

A PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE: ON PREACHING THE HOLIDAYS

“Should I Pause to Preach a Holiday Message?”

By Aaron C. Peer

I grew up under a mix of low-church philosophy and a strong focus on the Bible. The former led me to be automatically suspect of a high church practice like the liturgical calendar; the latter led me to believe that if I was not preaching straight through books of the Bible, then I wasn't being faithful to my people. So when I ran into my first holiday, I treated that Sunday like every other Sunday, plowing through whatever book I was studying.

A couple of years into my ministry, I realized my mistake. Refusing to take time to reflect on many of the great Christian holidays (and even some secular ones) was short-sighted. I was missing great opportunities for spiritually feeding God's flock. I have since found that incorporating special holiday sermons into my preaching calendar has three major benefits.

1. It helps us focus on the rhythm of the gospel

The liturgical calendar begins its focus on the Advent of Christ and his incarnation. It then moves to reflect on the life and ministry of Jesus through Lent, whose climax is the death (Good Friday) and resurrection (Easter Sunday). Finally, the liturgical calendar culminates in the celebration of Ascension Day and Pentecost. Placed in succession, these seasons encapsulate the gospel – Jesus' incarnation, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension/enthronement (1 Cor. 15:1-8, cf. Peter's sermons in Acts) While I am not suggesting we all follow the liturgical calendar, I think we can find creative ways to guide people through this great story throughout a given year. Consider the cycle of festivals God gave in the law. He intended them reflect his gracious work into their annual routine. The holidays, especially Christmas and Easter, provide us with a chance to work these gospel rhythms into people's hearts.

2. It takes advantage of what people are thinking about anyway

When holidays come, they normally grab people's attention. They are bombarded with information about the holiday anytime they turn on a TV, surf the internet, or enter a store. Why not use this opening to help guide their attention back onto Jesus? This includes secular holidays like Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, or Father's Day. If our people are already thinking about motherhood, then isn't it a great moment to catch their attention and help them see Mother's Day from a biblical perspective?

3. It is an opportunity to push people to think about these holidays biblically

People can often get consumed with their holiday traditions and miss out on the true meaning. Focused on Santa, gift-giving, Easter baskets, and painting eggs overshadows gospel truths. Holiday preaching returns attention to the person and work of Jesus. It is a short period where we can cut through the busyness and tradition and shine a light on Jesus and his gracious gifts.

Ultimately, preaching is an attempt to meet God's people with God's truth. Taking advantage of the times and seasons, including holidays, should include a timely word from the pulpit. Holidays are rife with redemptive truth. 'Tis' the season to preach them.

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