Reclaiming the Narrative in Preaching

Activity--Fish and Boulders

A narrative approach--Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (similar to reader-response criticism)

Reader-response criticism recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation.

* Approach the text first as readers (not experts, theologians, preachers, linguists, etc.)
* Keep the text open and give a close reading
* Ask questions (How do you think certain characters feel at points? How do you feel?)
* Share the journey--the questioning is not just for exegesis, but for preaching

What questions do we ask of a narrative?

Plot

* Connections between events (may require imagination)
  + Mark 1:40-45. Where is Jesus? Why?
  + Sermons can arise from these connections
  + Story Time vs. Discourse Time
    - Story--the order in which events occurred
    - Discourse--the order in the events are told
    - Mark 6:14-29--Flashback to the beheading of John. Why here?
    - Exercise: Picking a starting point in Mark 5:21-43
* Conflict
  + What is the source of the conflict in the text? Is it resolved? (In what ways does this conflict exist today? Is it resolved?)
  + What is God’s/Jesus’ role in the conflict?
  + The movement of conflict in the narrative can provide shape for the sermon
    - Eugene Lowry’s *The Homiletical Plot* is an excellent resource to help in providing a conflict-resolutional sermonic shape for non-narrative texts

Character

* Narrative criticism and homiletics often focus primarily on plot, but character is often even more important. The purpose of biblical narrative is to reveal the character of God/God in Christ (revelation of Mark 8:27-29). But it is also to show how we might become faithful characters in this story as well.
* Who is God/Jesus in the story?
* Who are the other characters? What do we know about them?
* How do we know it? (John 12:1-8, Judas and the expensive perfume)
* What is the Narrator’s attitude toward specific characters? What is our own?
* Exercise: Standing with different characters: Prodigal Son, Good Samaritan
* Don’t stand in too many different locations, and always make sure to stand together

Setting

* Temporal Setting
  + How might time be symbolic (John 13:30)
  + Also John 3:2, Nicodemus
* Spatial Setting
  + Pay attention like a movie director to the layout
  + Think Typologically
    - What connections are there to Jesus being baptized in the Jordan?
    - What do we think of in John 20, when Jesus goes into a garden?
* Think Socially
  + What does it mean to be in Galilee vs. Jerusalem?
  + What might it mean to be on one side of the sea of Galilee vs. the other?

**The benefits of reclaiming the narrative:**

* Scriptural
* Accessibility--it teaches people how to read without being afraid of their Bibles
* Mutuality--it decreases the distance between pulpit and pew (shared journey and shared joy)
* Diversity--it forces us out of our comfort zones
* Sustainability--it works as a method week in and week out for Bible study and sermon preparation as well

**Mark 5: 21-43**

**21** When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. **22** Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. **23** He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” **24** So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. **25** And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. **26** She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. **27** When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, **28** because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” **29** Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

**30** At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

**31** “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

**32** But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. **33** Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. **34** He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

**35** While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

**36** Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

**37** He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. **38** When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. **39** He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” **40** But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. **41** He took her by the hand and said to her, *“Talitha koum!”* (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). **42** Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. **43** He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.