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Series: Worship Workbench
Issue: Essay 191 + June, 2014
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IT'S THE LAW IN NORWAY Four Rules for Public Speaking

1 I've recently returned from Telluride, Colorado's *MountainFilm Festival*, a four day film fest and conference featuring top flight speakers and (mostly documentary) films. Adventure films, as you might guess – mountain climbing and kayaking and the like. But also stunning nature documentaries. (Have you ever seen a “*murmuration* of starlings”?) But also, increasingly, films addressing a host of social issues, from fracking to wilderness preservation. It's a heady and exhilarating several days. I've reported on the splendors of *MountainFilm* in a previous Essay (179).

2 But what prompts this posting is my severe-to-profound hearing loss, in my old age, and the burdens that impairment imposes -- on me and I am certain on others as well. These days I wear two high-tech hearing aids – each state of the art. And I make it a point to sit in the front rows – right under the speakers' noses, so as to be able to read lips.

3 In spite of these preparations and precautions, and in spite of high-tech Public Address systems in every venue, here's what I heard at various times this past weekend:

4 “Our speaker today is the first woman in the world ever to mumble, mumble, mumble...”

5 “In Norway, every new public building is required by law to feature a mumble, mumble, mumble...”

6 “The winner of the *Audience Favourite Award* this year is mumble, mumble, mumble...”

7 I could go on but I won't. You get the message. (I certainly did *not*!)

8 So my posting today constitutes a plea to public speakers. *Learn how to speak in public*. It's simply a courtesy to your hearers. Yes, it's a vanishing art. I've sung this song before in previous postings. But hear me out one more time. It's a matter of some consequence in leading worship and in preaching.

9 Remember: A microphone is your enemy. It seduces you into the belief that you can talk naturally. I put a mic in front of you and you assume you can speak conversationally. You can't. If you mumble into a mic, a mumble is what I'll hear.

10 Even with a mic, you must learn Four Simple Rules of public speaking.

11 First, *slow down*. A good public speaker never rushes through anything. You say you don't speak that way in conversation? Exactly my point. You *can't* speak that way *in public* and expect the hearing impaired to get your point.

12 Second: *Pump it out*. Speak louder than you would in private conversation. Even with a microphone. Speak from the diaphragm, not from the head or throat. Put your hands on your belly to test where your breath is coming from.

13 Third: *Enunciate more clearly* than you would in normal speech. Clip those consonants. Round those vowels. Use your lips more deliberately than you would in everyday conversation. Make it a point to avoid contractions; Say "does not" rather than "doesn't". An aged ear can confuse those sounds and turn your negative into a positive. Not good, if communication is what you're after.

14 Enunciation is especially important with foreign words, or obscure words, or unfamiliar words, or unexpected words. Or simply words critically important to your message. I never did find out what it was that woman did who was the first in the world to do it (number 4 above). Or what Norwegian law requires of every new public building (number 5 above). Those mumbled words were critically important to the speaker's message. And I never got them. You may even want to *spell them out* for your hearers.

15 Finally: *Speak in short phrases* – "sense lines", they're called in well-designed Christian lectionaries. Example:

16 "And it came to pass in those days..." A sense line, and it deserves a brief pause in delivery. "...that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus..." Another sense line, another pause. "...that all the world should be enrolled..." You get the idea. You're trying your best to bring your hearers along with you as you speak. Don't overload them.

17 That's all there is to it. It's quite simple. And no big burden. Anyone can learn to do it. Remember: *Public* speaking is not the same as *private* conversation. Follow these Four Rules and you cannot help but improve your public speaking.

18 Preachers and worship leaders specially ought to know and to practice these skills.

19 Maybe then I'd even be able to learn what it is that Norwegian law requires of every new public building. Hah!

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