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## **SPEAKING AND READING IN WORSHIP: Part One**

A Another Blast from the Past. This one was 35 from January 2009, subtitled then, When a PA System is The Enemy of Public Address and What You Can Do About It.

B I've chopped my Essay into two pieces, Part One and Part Two, retaining my numbering. I reproduce it here, and next month, almost un-edited.

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1 What do you do when the electric power in your church building fails – It happens, in a Canadian winter! – and your Public Address system shuts down? I'm turning in the following paragraphs to speaking and reading in a public setting without a microphone. These paragraphs might even be helpful when you must speak and read with a microphone. And I'm writing here from the perspective of someone with a severe hearing loss: Me.

2 I don't have to remind faithful readers of these Essays of my distaste for Public Address systems in church sanctuaries. That aversion arises from theological and ethical considerations as well as aesthetic. See Essay 193 above.

3 You have also found me willing to admit, begrudgingly, that there are many circumstances in which, despite my antipathy toward almost all high tech in worship, a PA system is sometimes indeed a necessity. There, I've said it.

4 What I have not done is offer helpful advice about speaking and reading in public with the naked human voice. Further: Here's some specific counsel about how to reach even those who are hearing impaired.

5 Before I begin, a demurer: I have no training as a speech therapist or elocutionist. I have had considerable amateur experience in theatre, and I feel that my current hearing loss, in my declining years, provides me at least a measure of authority in the subject: With an electronic hearing aid in each ear, I know when I can hear and comprehend, and when I can't. And I think I know the reasons.

6 So here goes. Four Tips for Public Speakers If They Want to be Both Heard and Understood. Plus a grab-bag of further advice.

7 The FIRST and easiest rule in projecting your voice in public is simply to slow down. Speak slowly. Slower than you might in normal conversation. Remember, public speech is not the same as conversation around the coffee table at Starbucks. If you speak in a rush of words, people like me with hearing problems have a very difficult time of it. See Tip Number 4 below...

8 SECOND: Pump it out. Speak louder than you would in Starbucks. Project your voice from your diaphragm, not from your throat. Make a conscious effort to reach the rear seats in your worship space with your voice. Even with a microphone, you can't whisper without long training and experience.

9 In all my 91 years, I've heard only one preacher who could make the most of a microphone effectively. At significant moments in his sermon, he'd project his voice, pumping out the volume, leaning back from the microphone so as not to overwhelm. At other moments he'd lean very close to the microphone, and whisper seductively. It was an altogether astonishing experience to hear him. But the ease and fluency and power of his preaching was the result of years of practice and experience, I am sure. You can't do it. Not yet anyhow.

10 Beware too that you don't fall into the habit of dropping your volume at the end of sentences, or at the conclusion of a sermon. It's a common failing among preachers almost certain to guarantee that a big percentage of your listeners will lose you.

11 And a microphone is your enemy, if it lulls you into thinking you don't need to project. So I say: Pump it out. Project: Even with electronic technology.

12 THIRD: Enunciate clearly. Clip those consonants. Round those vowels. Remember: In English speech, the consonants carry the meaning, the vowels carry the music. No, it's probably not the way you speak at home to spouse or kids. You simply have to practice this, if it doesn't come naturally.

13 Again, you're not in Starbucks when you're at that ambo. Preaching – and the public proclamation of Scripture – is not one-on-one conversation. It's public, corporate, communal discourse. You're trying to reach each listener with the Word of Life. Even those with hearing loss. Your listeners, in the words of a friend and mentor, should be able to discern in you "the will to communicate."

14 FOUR: Speak and read in sense lines. Try to communicate not simply words, but meanings. Newer lectionaries for use in worship print out their texts in what are called sense lines: small sequences of eight or ten words, maximum, that deliver short bursts of meaning: a kind of sound byte. It's voiced something like this: "And the angel said unto them" (pause) "Fear not." (pause) "For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy" (pause) "which shall be to all people..." That's perhaps overstating my point. But you get the idea, I hope.

15 Further for you preachers: Divide your sermon manuscript into sense lines as the last step in its composition. You'll find it's much easier to preach. And much easier for your listeners to hear and to comprehend. Many deaf people, like me, can hear well enough most of the time. What we can not do is comprehend that jumble of words you're pouring forth. Chopping up your vocalizing into sense lines or sound bytes is a great service to me, anyhow. Sound bites allow your hearers to catch up with your thoughts. And it needn't sound artificial.

16 Under ordinary circumstances, stress nouns and verbs when speaking, not adverbs or adjectives or prepositions. The heavy lifting in most sentences is done by the nouns and verbs. Adverbs, adjectives and prepositions are all qualifiers to the action announced in nouns and verbs. Those of us with hearing loss can generally intuit the qualifiers from the context, so long as we can hear the nouns and verbs.

17 And when you're writing, in many cases, as the old grammarians used to say, the adjective is the enemy of the noun.

18 Remember, you're not just reading or speaking words. You're communicating meanings. Even punctuation – periods, commas, semi-colons, etc – are not there to tell you when to pause, but to help you understand meanings. And to convey meanings.

19 Part Two will offer a grab bag of tips. And I'll keep this numbering of paragraphs.

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