

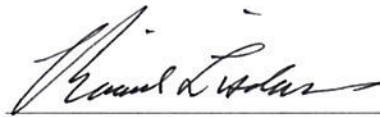
The Pulpit and the Memory Palace:
How a Classical Practice Can Help Contemporary Pastors to Preach by Heart

by

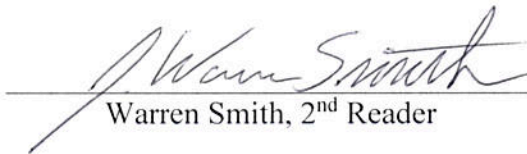
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This is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

ABSTRACT


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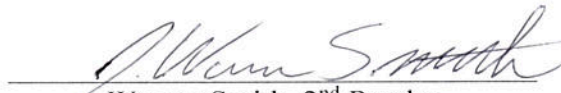
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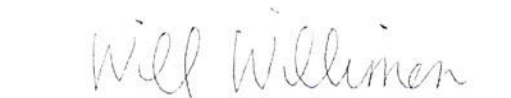
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THESIS ABSTRACT

The following thesis considers the benefits of classical rhetoric for contemporary preaching, with special reference to the classical memorization technique known as the method of loci (or Memory Palace). The goal for this research is to discern how the method of loci can help pastors to “preach by heart,” that is, to internalize the sermon such that they can preach it without notes as though it were an extemporaneous Spirit-prompted utterance. To this end, the thesis is structured around two parts. Following an Introduction that sets out the practical challenges to preaching by heart that attend many pastors, Part 1 provides a survey of classical rhetoric, especially the so-called “modes of persuasion” and “canons of rhetoric,” before then turning specifically to the canon of *Memoria* (“memory”) and its concomitant practice of the Memory Palace. Part 2 applies the insights of the first part to the process of sermon preparation more broadly, and then walks through the practice of the Memory Palace for preaching in particular. A Conclusion recapitulates the argument and demonstrates the method of loci in practice.

*To Anne,
who knows me by heart*

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The nature of this program is that, in many cases, a parish shares its pastor with his studies. I’m thankful for all the support that I received from the saints at Beautiful Savior Lutheran in Spokane, WA, and now Trinity Lutheran in Arcadia, MI.

Finally, I am unspeakably grateful to my family. My parents, Patrick and Patrice, always encouraged me to pursue further education, and believed I could (and should) complete a doctorate. My wonderful, inquisitive children, Sam, Louis, Beatrice, and Elisabeth, put up with Daddy’s time studying and writing without complaint. And most of all, I am grateful to my loving and supportive wife, Anne, who insisted that pursuing my doctorate at Duke was “my best yes.” To her this work is dedicated.

INTRODUCTION: PREACHING BY HEART

The challenge of memory in preaching

“I will combine memory and delivery in one of the few sweeping generalizations I can make about preaching through the ages,” writes O.C. Edwards, Jr., in his exhaustive *History of Preaching*. “Which is that, with rare exceptions, the most effective preachers have not preached from manuscripts.”¹ Pastors know this all too well. They devote a week or more to thoughtful, Spirit-filled preparation to preach: studying the Scriptures, reading commentaries, wrestling to discern the text’s present significance as well as its original meaning, and of course praying. The culmination of this preparation is that, Lord willing, they not only *have to say* something; they *have something to say*. They have a word from the Lord to His gathered people; a message from the heart. As St. Paul told the Corinthians: “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open” (2 Corinthians 6.11). But indeed this message comes not merely from their own all-too-human hearts, but from the very heart of God. Its glad and believing reception is therefore of the utmost importance.

But here is where the challenge presents itself. The preacher steps up to the pulpit with the Word of God for the people of God. The congregation looks on in expectation.

The preacher returns their gaze, poised and prepared, and then...looks down *to read*.

Enthusiastically, perhaps, even dramatically (like Orson Wells in a radio theatre), but read

¹ O.C. Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 836. Edwards goes on to make a statement that anticipates where the present thesis is headed: “In not doing so they have to an extent honored the standard of the Greco-Roman rhetoricians, who either memorized their orations or spoke them extemporaneously.”

nevertheless.² And just like that, the intimate connection between preacher and people, between God's heart and the heart of the church, is interrupted by an interloper: the preacher's notes. The link has not been severed, to be sure; the Word can still work. And yet there may be a discomfiting sense—for the preacher, if not also for the people—that some degree of connection has been lost.

The difficulty is long-standing. "Memory, or the lack of it," writes Clyde Fant, "presents a unique and often frustrating challenge to preachers." He goes on to delineate this challenge's many facets:

Should the problems of remembering the sermon be eliminated by the writing and reading of a manuscript? Or should notes alone, whether extensive or meager, be taken into the pulpit and memory be trusted for the balance? Or should written materials be avoided altogether in delivering the sermon? And if so, should the sermon be memorized line by line from a previously written manuscript? What place, if any, should memory play in the delivery of a sermon?³

Fant has outlined several approaches to the challenge of memory in preaching.

The first and arguably most common approach is to preach *from the page*. Thus the preacher will write out a complete manuscript and take it to the pulpit or platform, or else devise an outline from which to speak. In this case, the concern for memory has been addressed by largely removing the need for its use, as Plato famously argued, by means

² As John Broadus remarked in 1870, preachers that read their sermons "scarcely ever raise us higher than to feel that really this man reads almost like speaking" (John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* [New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1899], 444).

³ Clyde Fant, "Memory," in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, William Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds. (Louisville: WJK, 1995), 331-332.

of the written word.⁴ This has the benefit of giving the preachers the confidence of knowing just what they'll say, which is no small thing. Its drawback, though, as has already been alluded to, is that it disrupts the connection between pastor and people. But more than that, as we will see presently, preaching from the page can also compromise the preacher's credibility.

The second approach, which swings in the complete opposite direction, is to preach, so to speak, *from the hip*. Sometimes known as "impromptu preaching," to preach from the hip is to supplant memory with (supposedly Spirit-driven) spontaneity. In this regard Jesus' words in Matthew are appealed to: "When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19–20). Hugh Oliphant Old observes that "many preachers have used this as a justification for impromptu preaching on all occasions."⁵ Traditionally associated with the Quakers, Pentecostals, and some African-American preaching, in its more extreme forms impromptu preaching may purposefully eschew preparation lest the Holy Spirit's pathway be hindered by the preacher's own pondering.⁶

⁴ See his critique in *Phaedrus*, in which he has a King Thamus saying (through Socrates): "If men learn this [writing], it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks" (§274c-275 b).

⁵ Hugh Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 142.

⁶ See Michael P. Graves, "Ministry and Preaching," in Stephen Angell, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), chapter 18.

In endeavoring to be free of memory, however, this method threatens to become free of meaning.⁷

The third approach is in one sense a moderating position and in another its own extreme—what we might call preaching *from the head*. This is the sort of preaching in which, as Fant puts it, the sermon is “memorized line by line from a previously written manuscript.” While this might seem at first to resolve the challenge of memory, upon further examination it merely magnifies it. Now the preacher is tightrope walking in the pulpit, attempting to remember lines like a Broadway actor. Even where this approach is done successfully, however—which is to say, where the preacher manages not to forget the text of the sermon—it easily lapses into what Richard Lischer refers to as “reading the teleprompter in your head.”

Preaching from the page, from the hip, and from the head: each of these approaches in their own way addresses the problem of memory. And while they each have their positive attributes, they also have significant flaws. Another alternative is needed.

Preaching by heart

⁷ T. Harwood Pattison, in *The Making of the Sermon* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1902), criticizes the impromptu approach with the following anecdote: “‘My Lord,’ a clergyman once boasted to his bishop, ‘when I go up the steps of the pulpit I never know the subject of my sermon’; and the bishop answered him, ‘No, and I hear that your congregation does not when you come down’” (322).

I would like to suggest that a more salutary approach is preaching *by heart*.⁸ In one respect, this approach is a combination of the best features of each of the other three mentioned: the preparation that comes with preaching from the page, the Spirit-led spontaneity of preaching from the hip, and the commitment to memory of preaching from the head. In another respect, however, preaching by heart is more than a mere patchwork quilt of other ideas; it is, rather, its own distinct approach to sermon delivery and even, as we shall see, to sermon preparation.

What, then, do we mean by “preaching by heart”? The concept comprises several elements. Haddon Robinson, echoing concerns already raised, elucidates the first:

Your sermon should not be read to a congregation. Reading usually kills a lively sense of communication. Neither should you try to memorize your manuscript. Not only does memorization place a hefty burden on you if you speak several times a week, but an audience senses when you are reading words of the wall of your mind. Agonize with thought and words at your desk, and what you write will be internalized.⁹

The sermon being *internalized* is a helpful concept and the essential element of preaching by heart.¹⁰ One calls to mind the traditional Collect for the Word, in which we

⁸ What I have called “preaching by heart” most clearly has resonances with what has sometimes been known as “extemporaneous preaching,” though this term is rather facile and given to abuse (for instance, it can be used synonymously with impromptu preaching). See Henry Ware, Jr., *Hints on Extemporaneous Preaching* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, & Co., 1824). Cf. also Quintilian, *Institutio Oratorica*, 10.7: “The greatest fruit of our studies, the richest harvest of our long labors, is *the ability to speak extemporaneously*” (*ex tempore dicendi facultas*).

⁹ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 185-186.

¹⁰ For some readers this may raise the question of what form the sermon should initially be composed in: manuscript, outline, etc. For present purposes of this thesis, however, we will remain indifferent to the question. It will become clear in the course of our argument that something like an outline is probably to be preferred, but whether the preacher writes out all of the sermon or none of the sermon beforehand is immaterial at this point. All that is presupposed is a prepared message, whatever form it may take.

aspire to “hear, read, mark, learn, and *inwardly digest*” the Holy Scriptures. So preachers also aspire to “inwardly digest” the message of the sermon so that it, in a sense, becomes part of them. Thomas Long, furthering the thought, advises preachers to practice their sermon such that they “absorb it”: “We do not memorize it, but we learn it ‘by heart’ and, thus, can be more present with and for the hearers in the actual event of preaching.”¹¹

A second element to preaching by heart is the one that has been most commonly associated with this conversation in recent years—namely, that the proclamation occurs *without notes*.¹² The notion of “preaching without notes,” about which more below, has much in common our concept of “preaching by heart.” The principal contrast we wish to draw is that the former has the potential for confusing the means and the end. Our goal isn’t to be *sans* notes, per se; that is more of a byproduct or necessary precondition for something more. That “something more” is the third element of preaching by heart.

In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, a rhetorical treatise from the 1st century before Christ, the unknown author¹³ wrote, “This one must remember: good delivery ensures that what the orator is saying *seems to come from his heart*.”¹⁴ Why this is so significant

¹¹ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 269.

¹² The phrase was evidently popularized by Charles Koller in his book *How to Preach Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), originally published as *Expository Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962).

¹³ In the introduction to his translation of the work for the Loeb Classical Library, Harry Caplan writes, “Although the belief in Ciceronian authorship has still not entirely disappeared, all the recent editors agree that the attribution is erroneous” (Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Loeb Classical Library Vol. 403., Harry Caplan, trans. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954], ix. Throughout this thesis we will follow the Loeb’s lead and refer to the author as Pseudo-Cicero.

¹⁴ *Ex animo agi videatur*: Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.27.

for preachers we will return to presently, but suffice it to say at the moment that if such authenticity mattered for classical orators, many of whom were peddling messages merely for profit or acclaim (as with the Sophists), then it should matter all the more for Christian heralds of the free grace of Christ in the gospel.

Now we have all the elements in place in order to offer a definition of our concept of preaching by heart. It is neither mere memorization nor impromptu *ex corde* utterance. Rather, *preaching by heart is proclamation in which the essential message of the sermon becomes so internalized by the preacher that he or she can stand before the people of God and proclaim it without notes as if it were an authentically Spirit-prompted utterance—which is in fact what it is.* In other words, preaching by heart is proclamation in which there is harmony between preachers’ message and their manner, between their heart and their delivery.

Two other linguistic features should also be remarked upon that the phrase “preaching by heart” deliberately evokes. First, the phrase “learn by heart” is a common idiom to describe committing something to memory. It is even more apt than the simple notion of “memorization,” though, since it avoids the negative connotations that, as we have observed above, can come with that word. On the contrary, for the Christian “learning by heart” might even call to mind the Psalm: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (119.11 NIV). To learn something by heart suggests not merely that you have hammered it into your head, but that you have, as we say, “taken it to heart.”

Secondly, and following from this, preaching “by heart” bears resemblance to (without being a twin of) the notion of something coming “from the heart.” This phrase is not unproblematic. It can suggest a soppy sentimentalism or anti-intellectual emotionalism; that is not the intention here. Rather, it is echoed in order to capture the sense that the preacher is himself implicated in the message and invested in it. While it is certainly true that St. Paul could rejoice that “in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed” (Philippians 1.18), all things being equal the Church rightly desires preachers who are personally committed to their message.

Why preaching by heart matters

Before moving forward, we should comment upon an assumption of the present author and an animating purpose for this thesis, which has been hinted at in the foregoing discussion. The assumption, simply put, is that *preachers actually believe what they preach*. Sophists and false prophets can *seem* genuine without actually being so. The problem that stems from the challenge of memory for many faithful preachers is the reverse: they can *be* genuine without *seeming* so. A disconnect can thus arise between preachers’ reality and their perception by the congregation. Their delivery belies their beliefs. And this brings us face to face with the issue of why preaching by heart is so vitally important.

Perhaps we can get at this by way of an illustration from the popular Netflix drama *The Crown*, which traces the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth II. One episode

recounts the growing public dissent and even derision that the Queen was receiving in the late 1950s. Much of this stemmed from her public speaking skills, or lack thereof. The matter comes to a head when a small-time journalist known as Lord Altrincham pens an op-ed criticizing the Queen's practice of reading her addresses from a manuscript.

A mix of both public agreement and opprobrium ensues, and so Lord Altrincham is invited to defend his remarks on a television news magazine. The host presses him: "Judging from your article, you'd like the Queen to have the qualities of a wit, you'd like her to be a better orator, a TV personality, in addition to being a diligent, dutiful and devoted monarch and a mother."¹⁵ But the journalist responds in a way that may speak to preachers as well: "All I'm suggesting is that, in her public speeches and in her appearances, she should be more, uh, natural. Her style of speaking is, quite frankly, a pain in the neck. She sounds strangled. I had the misfortune of hearing one of the Queen's speeches in a dental waiting room recently. I was horrified by the indifference and inertia with which the speech was greeted."

What Lord Altrincham is insisting, and what the Queen herself grudgingly comes to accept, is that her inability to speak without notes was ultimately a crisis of credibility.¹⁶ If she wasn't sufficiently convinced and gripped by her message so as to deliver it "by heart," so to speak, how could—or should—her people be? And if that was

¹⁵ Pastors may have flashbacks here: "In addition to being a devoted shepherd, I must be a better orator, a TV personality, a CEO, marketing expert..."

¹⁶ In the terms of classical rhetoric, this is an *ethos* problem. We will explore this further in the next chapter.

true for the Crown of England, how much more so for us who claim to speak on behalf of the Crown of all creation?

In his book *Communicating for a Change*, Andy Stanley drills down on this theme of credibility.¹⁷ He makes the analogy to an actor, that no performer worth his weight in salt would walk on stage with script in hand. “Like a good actor,” he writes, “you’ve got to be believable”:

After all, you actually believe! People are expecting you to engage them on multiple levels. And in light of what’s at stake, you should be both engaging and convincing. If an actor is willing to memorize and internalize a script in order to convince you that he or she is someone other than who they really are, how motivated should we be to internalize our messages in order to convince our audience that we really are who we claim to be?¹⁸

At its root, then, the inability to preach by heart presents a *pastoral* problem: preachers are not able to have the same degree of personal connectedness with their congregations, their credibility is compromised, and so the effectiveness of the proclamation suffers.¹⁹

We might also note in passing that failure to preach by heart also presents (in a variety of forms) a *practical* problem: needing some manner of notes, whether that be a full manuscript or even just an outline, keeps the preacher tied to the pulpit or lectern like

¹⁷ According to the “modes of persuasion” in classical rhetoric, this would be *ethos*: the personal character of the speaker. Here the focus is narrowly on memorization in preaching, but of course *ethos* comprises numerous aspects concerning the character and authority of the speaker. See Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, II.1368a.

¹⁸ Andy Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006), 133-134.

¹⁹ On a personal level, feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty may also arise in the heart of the preacher.

an astronaut tethered to her shuttle.²⁰ Neither wants to be lost in space, but as a result the amount of exploration is limited.

Practical challenges aside, however, it is the threat to credibility that makes preaching by heart such a pressing concern for pastors. For Christians (preachers included!), the power of persuasion—indeed, conversion—rests with the Word of God. But if that Word is not heard on account of the proclaimer’s oratory, if the message is undermined by the messenger, then the Spirit’s work is stunted. To be sure, as Luther would remind us, the God who could speak through a donkey can speak through inadequate preachers no less. But most preachers would agree that this is not an excuse for giving anything less than their best. We are ambassadors for the King; how could we but own His good news for ourselves? Stanley writes, “I find something very disingenuous about the speaker who says, ‘This is very, very important,’ and then reads something from his notes...Every effective communicator must figure out how to internalize all of and memorize a majority of his or her message.”²¹

²⁰ One colleague tells me that she learned to preach from memory during a summer serving at a Christian camp whose outdoor chapel lacked a pulpit or any kind of lectern. “Necessity,” etc.

²¹ Stanley, *Communicating*, 135.

So the question is: how?²²

“Preaching without notes”: other solutions

Homiletic textbooks routinely address the task of memorization and delivery, but even the best ones tend not to offer substantive practical guidance in accomplishing it.²³ For example, Donald Sunukjian, after discouraging the use of notes by preachers, quickly qualifies, “I’m not suggesting that you memorize your message. But I am suggesting that if you have a clear outline, have worked on your wording, and have gone over the message several times . . . then you *will* be able to deliver it freely without notes.”²⁴ This may be true, but the counsel undoubtedly leaves something to be desired.

In addition to the textbook treatments of preparation for sermon delivery, there are a pair of monographs that have gone further in providing practical directives for what we have called “preaching by heart,” and that have exercised especial influence on pastors hoping to break the grip of the manuscript: *How to Preach Without Notes* by Charles

²² A theological objection may be raised that, incidentally, resonates deeply with me as a Lutheran committed to the efficacy of God’s Word. Some could say, “The Word of God never returns void, and the Bible doesn’t add any caveats about whether or not it’s read.” This is a fair point and not to be denied. That said, it is surely also the case that message and messenger converge in the preaching task, and that so-called “First Article gifts”—including rhetoric—should not be eschewed. At the end of the (Sun)day, though, every preacher commits their work to God and says, with St. Paul, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (I Corinthians 3.6). To provide a full theological justification for the issues under consideration in this thesis goes beyond our scope. Suffice it to say that, in the mystery of conversion, what matters is both the power of the Word and, at least to some extent, the persuasiveness of the preacher. See, e.g., the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8.4-15 and parallels), in which the efficacy of the seed, the Word, is dependent upon it being understood.

²³ See, for example, Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, ch. 10; Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, ch. 10; Donald Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007); Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), chapter 10.

²⁴ Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, 302.

Koller²⁵ and, more recently, Joseph Webb's *Preaching Without Notes*.²⁶ A brief review of these influential books is in order.

How to Preach Without Notes

Koller catalogs the various and sundry strategies that preachers will use in order to achieve what he calls “note-free delivery.”²⁷ While his book is now a half-century old, it's safe to say that these are still the strategies used by most pastors. First, there is the attempt to compose a manuscript and then memorize it—what we have called above “preaching from the head.” Apart from the sheer practical challenge of accomplishing this feat on a weekly basis (if not more often), Koller notes that there's the danger of this coming off as more *declamation* than *proclamation*—like rhetorical push-ups instead of evangelical preaching.

Secondly, there's the practice of taking a manuscript into the pulpit but with a careful taxonomy of underlining, highlighting, or otherwise noting key statements in the sermon. Koller suggests that this method often sounds something like the oral recitation of an article abstract. The upshot is that the sermon ends up as the worst of both worlds—being neither a memorized manuscript nor an impromptu utterance, it comes off as a dance routine that only kicks in with every third or fourth step.

²⁵ Koller, *How to Preach Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). Originally published as *Expository Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962).

²⁶ Joseph Webb, *Preaching Without Notes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

²⁷ Koller, *How to Preach*, chapter 13.

Finally, and what Koller himself advocates for, is the development of a “carefully prepared outline.” As Koller states, “The better the outline, the greater the likelihood of its not being needed in the pulpit.”²⁸ He then goes on to lay out a dizzyingly detailed system of points and sub-points, headings and indentations. It’s an impressive device, and surely it has aided many preachers over the last half-century. One is nevertheless left with the impression, however, that its complexity detracts from its usefulness—and in any event, it has not gone much further actually to assist the pastor to preach by heart.

Preaching Without Notes

In his book *Preaching Without Notes*, Joseph Webb builds on Koller’s work and takes it a good bit further. To begin with, Webb situates note-free preaching within the larger context of sermon preparation: “The decision to preach a sermon without notes should be made before the sermon is prepared, not after. This is because preaching without notes requires one to prepare in some strikingly different ways than if one plans to write out and preach from a manuscript, or even to preach from an extensively worked outline.”²⁹ Preaching without notes is thus not a stand-alone accomplishment, but the product of a broader process that begins with careful study and, indeed, diligent note-taking.

Like Koller, he advocates developing an outline to be learned by heart; unlike Koller, he focuses on what he calls “sequences” rather than a succession of points and

²⁸ Ibid, 92.

²⁹ Joseph Webb, *Preaching Without Notes*, 35.

sub-points. He writes, “This is one of the major differences between outlining the inductive sermon to be preached without notes and the older forms of sermon outlining, particularly the outlining of the deductive sermon.”³⁰ Webb prescribes a four-step process for developing the sequences: isolating, arranging, marking, and evaluating. Such organizing is far more important to preaching without notes than mnemonic tricks: “Of all the things that recent research has taught us about the enhancement of human memory, none is more important than the clear, concise organization of the materials to be memorized.”³¹ Well-arranged sermons run laps around acrostics any day.

He then turns to the memorization of the sermon proper—and here is where Webb’s approach may leave the preacher wanting more. Helpfully, Webb suggests several factors that contribute to a strong short-term memory (physical and mental health, concentration, interest in the material, etc.).³² Ultimately, though, he lands on the essential role of *repetition*: “There is no substitute for it... Only the repetition of the materials to be memorized, within the context of those factors, actually results in activating short-term memory.”³³ Webb advises devoting two blocks of time to “concentrated memorization” (each about an hour long), taking a refresher hour a day later, and then giving a brief review Sunday morning. He writes, “I go through the

³⁰ Ibid, 58-59.

³¹ Ibid, 82-83.

³² Cf. the practical advice of Quintilian: “Learning by heart and writing have in common that both are greatly assisted by good health, good digestion, and a mind free of other distractions” (*Institutio Oratorica* 11.2 §35).

³³ Ibid, 84.

sequence titles in order, repetitiously speaking them aloud, continuing down the list. I do it over and over again until I can almost do it without thinking about them.”³⁴

This is helpful counsel so far as it goes. *Repetitio mater studiorum est*, as the old maxim has it (“repetition is the mother of learning”), and in general one ought to subscribe to it whole-heartedly. But is there no better alternative to what, as Webb concedes, amounts to nose-to-the-grindstone rote learning? A recent *New York Times* article lamented,

We think memorizing is laborious, boring work because we’ve been taught to do it by rote. You may recall, as I do, countless hours in third grade poring over multiplication tables or, in ninth grade, endlessly conjugating French (or Spanish) verbs, or in 11th grade, incessantly reciting Macbeth’s “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” soliloquy in the attempt to firmly place them in long-term memory. These brute-force approaches are dull because they’re devoid of any creativity.³⁵

In modern parlance, are there no “memory hacks”? Surveying the solutions proposed by Koller, Webb, and others would apparently confirm the conclusion of Clyde Fant: “There seems to be no great secret to the art of those who preach largely from memory, no clever devices to aid in memorizing the sermon.”³⁶

And yet, remarkably, there remains a near-complete neglect of the method for learning by heart that enabled classical orators, Patristic preachers, and medieval missionaries to speak with confidence and persuasiveness without the benefit of any

³⁴ Ibid, 94.

³⁵ Austin Frakt, “An Ancient and Proven Way to Improve Memorization; Go Ahead and Try It,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/24/upshot/an-ancient-and-proven-way-to-improve-memory-go-ahead-and-try-it.html>. Accessed 16 Feb 2018.

³⁶ Fant, “Memory,” 331-332.

notes³⁷. It is a method that “Roman senators had used to memorize their speeches, that the Athenian statesman Themistocles had supposedly used to memorize the names of twenty thousand Athenians, and that medieval scholars had used to memorize entire books.”³⁸ It’s known as the Method of Loci or, more affectionately, the Memory Palace.³⁹

The Memory Palace (aka the Method of Loci)

In Book X of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine makes a move that is not uncommon for him, particularly in that work: he starts his exploring his memory. For many of us, such exploration is akin to sifting through grandma’s attic. The space is cluttered with all sorts of stuff—some interesting, some not, and much of it with unclear origins and/or dubious value (“Why in the world do I remember the 90s jingle for pizza bagels?”). For Augustine, though, the memory is not an attic; it’s a *palace*:

I will pass then beyond this power of my nature also, rising by degrees unto Him Who made me. And I come to the fields and spacious palaces of my memory, where are the treasures of innumerable images, brought into it from things of all sorts perceived by the senses. There is stored up, whatsoever besides we think, either by enlarging or diminishing, or any other way varying those things which the sense hath come to; and whatever else hath been committed and laid up, which forgetfulness hath not yet swallowed up and buried. When I enter there, I require what I will to be brought forth, and something instantly comes; others must be longer sought after, which are fetched, as it were, out of some inner

³⁷ In the excellent (and exhaustive) *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, the Memory Palace does not receive so much as a passing reference in the article on “Memory,” much less an article of its own.

³⁸ Joshua Foer, *Moonwalking With Einstein* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 10.

³⁹ Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms Method of Loci and Memory Palace near interchangeably. Strictly speaking, the former connotes more the process, whereas the latter connotes more the product. Nevertheless, in the literature they are for all practical purposes synonyms. Other terms that will be introduced in turn include *Memoria* and the Art of Memory.

receptacle; others rush out in troops, and while one thing is desired and required, they start forth, as who should say, "Is it perchance I?" These I drive away with the hand of my heart, from the face of my remembrance; until what I wish for be unveiled, and appear in sight, out of its secret place. Other things come up readily, in unbroken order, as they are called for; those in front making way for the following; and as they make way, they are hidden from sight, ready to come when I will. All which takes place when I repeat a thing by heart.⁴⁰

Fast forward some fifteen hundred years. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's brilliant detective Sherlock Holmes is remarkable in many ways, but not least his ability to recall with stunning rapidity and accuracy a clue or piece of information from his memory. In a thrilling scene from the critically-acclaimed BBC adaptation of the mysteries, we witness the master at work.⁴¹ Sherlock has just been shot point blank, and time slows down as he suddenly must determine what to do to save his own life. In a flash Holmes is exploring what he call his "mind palace": an intricate collection of data laid out like furniture in a mansion of many rooms.⁴² Quickly, practically instantaneously, Holmes searches through his mind palace for just the bit of info he needs—in this case, a quick survival tactic. He retrieves it, performs the requisite intervention, and the show goes on. Meanwhile, the viewer is left to marvel at Sherlock's magnificent mind.

What Augustine, with his "vast palaces of memory," and Sherlock, with his "mind palace," are both harkening back to is an ancient, time-tested method of learning by heart. Various known as the method of loci, Memory Palace, or Art of Memory, it was

⁴⁰ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8

⁴¹ In the episode entitled "His Last Vow," from Series 3. This episode has a further twist, as Sherlock's nemesis also makes use of the memory palace technique.

⁴² Sarah Zielinski, "The Secret of Sherlock's Mind Palace." Smithsonian.com. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/secrets-sherlocks-mind-palace-180949567/> (accessed 29 Dec 17).

developed by the ancient Greeks some 400 years before Christ and continued in common use by rhetors of all kinds for more than two millennia. In a nutshell, the method entails two elements: places (*loci*) and images (*imagines*) or, otherwise put, Sites and Symbols.⁴³

First, the speaker thinks of a familiar location, or Site: a childhood home, workplace floor, or even a neighborhood block. Any place that she can recall and retrace without effort. Secondly, the speaker encodes or “translates” the various and sundry points, arguments, or sections of the oration (be it a speech, sermon, toast, etc.) into concrete Symbols. For example, if in the introduction (classically known as the *exordium*) of his closing arguments a lawyer wanted to recount his client’s alibi—he was in fact bowling at Featherstone Lanes—he might conjure in his Memory Palace the defendant, adorned with feathers, dropping a bowling ball on his toe.⁴⁴ Later, in his refutation of the prosecution’s arguments (the *refutatio*) the lawyer might want to point out contradictions in the accuser’s testimony—“Was the murder weapon a candlestick or a revolver, Miss Scarlet?”—by imagining her as conjoined twins, bopping one another over the head with the respective implements. And so on. Finally, the Symbols are arranged throughout (or along) the chosen Site. For example, our lawyer could place his feathered friend in the entrance to his home (that is, the “introduction” of the house) and the irate twins in a subsequent room, such as the kitchen—with other Symbols filling in

⁴³ Throughout this thesis, Sites and Symbols will be capitalized in order to denote the specific Latin vocabulary of the Memory Palace: *loci* and *imagines*, respectively. The Latin terms will themselves occasionally be used as well. The more general terms “place” and “image” will be used more loosely and not capitalized.

⁴⁴ As will be discussed later, the ancients advise that the more ridiculous the image the better.

along the way. Then, in order to recall his closing arguments, the lawyer simply “walks through” the Memory Palace in his mind as he speaks: “In the first place...”

In recent years the Memory Palace has experienced something of a renaissance among so-called “memory athletes” and also those who are required to remember vast sums of information, such as medical students.⁴⁵ But as Frances Yates reminds us, in her seminal work on the subject, *The Art of Memory*, “The first basic fact which the student of the history of the classical art of memory must remember is that the art belonged to rhetoric as a technique by which the orator could improve his memory, which would enable him to deliver long speeches from memory with unfailing accuracy.”⁴⁶ And so, in recovering its use for the pulpit we are, in a sense, seeking to bring the Memory Palace back closer to its home.

Outline of the argument

This thumbnail sketch of the method of loci will be substantially expanded upon and applied to preachers in due course. Let’s briefly outline the argument from here. In Part I, we will do an historical overview of classical rhetoric in general (chapter 1) and *Memoria* and the Memory Palace in particular (chapter 2). As we will see, the art of memory cannot be isolated from its associated constellation of practices known as the “canons of rhetoric.” In this initial section we will be interacting especially with the

⁴⁵ See Joshua Foer, *Moonwalking*. A Google search retrieves several websites that promote the *method loci*, e.g., <https://mullenmemory.com>.

⁴⁶ Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 18.

Greco-Roman orators Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and the aforementioned anonymous author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.

This historical foundation has interest in its own right for modern preachers, but for the purposes of this thesis it is especially necessary in preparing for the practical application of Part II. In this latter half of the thesis we will take the lessons learned from the historical practice of classical rhetoric and bring them to bear on modern preaching. Chapter 3 will take initial steps toward developing a process for weekly sermon preparation that has as its framework the classical canons, and then in chapter 4 we will focus on the nuts and bolts of the Memory Palace proper. A concluding chapter will assemble the pieces of the argument and demonstrate how preachers can construct their own Memory Palaces.

PART 1:
CLASSICAL RHETORIC AND THE METHOD OF LOCI

CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF CLASSICAL RHETORIC

What classical rhetoric is and why preachers today should care about it

The Memory Palace is part of the impressive patrimony of classical rhetoric. The phrase “classical rhetoric” may sound a little vague but it in fact has a relatively specific meaning; we can break it down according to its two parts. By *rhetoric* is meant the art of public speaking, or in the words of the Roman orator Quintilian, it is the *bene dicendi scientia*: “the knowledge of speaking well.”¹ The *classical* in this phrase refers to this art as it was developed by the ancient Greeks and Romans, going back to the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The main characters are orators such as Plato and Aristotle (from the Greeks), and Cicero and Quintilian (from the Romans).

Putting the pieces together, George Kennedy defines classical rhetoric thusly:

The Greeks gave names to rhetorical techniques, many of which are found all over the world. They organized these techniques into a system which could be taught and learned. What we mean by classical rhetorical theory is this structured system which describes the universal phenomenon of rhetoric in Greek terms.²

Before going forward, some might well ask why we would *want* to attend to the antiquated public speaking techniques of the ancients. In particular, what relevance could this have for contemporary preachers, who are supposedly living in a “visual age” and its surfeit of images?³ Several responses come to mind. First, in the broadest sense we might invoke Justin Martyr’s famous dictum that “whatever things were rightly said among all

¹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratorica*, 2.15.34.

² George Kennedy, *The New Testament and Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 11.

³ See, e.g., Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

men, are the property of us Christians.”⁴ To the extent that classical rhetoric offers helpful insights into the way communication works, and works well, Christians can and should take advantage of it. Secondly, many of the greatest preachers of the Early Church not only employed the art of rhetoric in their preaching but were themselves teachers of oratory—Ambrose, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa among them. As David Dunn-Wilson has observed, “For the great preachers [of the Early Church] who were trained as rhetors, it seemed natural to transfer their skills to the pulpit.”⁵ And if it is not already a rule of thumb then it should be one, that if it was good enough for Augustine it’s good enough for me. Thirdly, granted that we are living in a “post-literate” age, there may be great benefit in attending to the wisdom of our *pre-literate* forebears⁶. For contemporary preachers, an especially fertile source of such ancient wisdom is classical rhetoric. Finally, to the claim that our preaching should be more “image-based,” as we shall see in due course classical rhetoric generally and the Memory Palace in particular relies heavily on the use of images—just not in the simplistic way sometimes advocated nowadays (such as by using PowerPoint slides). Suffice it to say, then, pastors can and should plunder these ancient spoils, accusations of their being outdated or irrelevant aside.

⁴ *Second Apology* §13.

⁵ David Dunn-Wilson, *A Mirror for the Church: Preaching in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 86.

⁶ See especially Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982). On our post-literate age, see also Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin, 1986), and Richard Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age* (Lima, OH: CSS, 1993).

Now, the ground of classical rhetoric is broad country and other authors are much more capable cartographers.⁷ Here we want only to map some general territory that is particularly pertinent to preachers before homing in on the *ars memoriae*, the art of memory. First, we'll consider what Aristotle called the "modes of persuasion." Then, we'll look at the five "canons" (or parts) of rhetoric as they were taught by classical rhetoricians. This will bring us back finally to a focus on one of those five canons, *Memoria*.

How to move people with words: the three modes of persuasion

After a particularly effective sermon, a parishioner might say to the preacher, "Thank you for your message today. I found it so *moving*." It's a remarkable turn of phrase, when you think about it. Newton would tell us that no one and nothing is moving unless some external force acts upon it. My chair will stay in its same place unless an earthquake or a four-year-old rattles it. The hitter will stay in the batter's box unless and until a pitch comes in too close. Your coffee will stay situated on the desk until you need another sip of caffeine. Try to command the coffee into your mouth, though, and you'll stay thirsty—not to mention drowsy. We don't normally think of words as being such an "external force."

⁷ See especially George Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1999), and Edward Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (Oxford: OUP, 1998). In order to get a big-picture handle on the field, as well as find a helpful glossary of terms, one might also look at the *Silva Rhetoricae* ("Forest of Rhetoric") hosted by the Brigham Young University department of rhetoric: <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/forest.htm>.

Our grateful parishioner is not speaking nonsense, however. Experience, as well as Scripture, would attest that not only brute force can move someone; so, too, can speech.⁸ This is what Aristotle is getting at when he defines rhetoric as “in any given case the available means of persuasion.” Otherwise put, rhetoric is how to move people—with *words*. And according to Aristotle, the means for effecting this movement are chiefly three:

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the **personal character** of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain **frame of mind**; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by **the words of the speech itself**.⁹

These three kinds are known as, respectively, *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.¹⁰ Let’s consider these briefly. First, the speaker persuades by means of his *ethos*, Aristotle says, “when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible.” On the one hand, *ethos* is established before a word comes out of the speaker’s mouth; the expression “his reputation precedes him” gets at this notion. This is why a keynote speaker is introduced with his resume and why brands covet celebrity endorsements. *Ethos* deals in authority, answering the question in the audience’s mind—even before a word is uttered—“Why

⁸ As my focus here is on rhetoric, I will set aside concern for what Aristotle calls “external” (*atechnoi*) modes of persuasion: coercive threats, contracts, etc. (*Art of Rhetoric*, 1355b).

⁹ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 1356a. Kennedy (*Classical Rhetoric*, 82), notes that these three correspond to the three consistent parts of any speech-act: speaker, audience, and speech.

¹⁰ Note that these are not a prescribed order. *Pathos* may just as likely provide a closing appeal as be part of the body of an oration.

should I listen to you?” (Whether the ability to dunk a basketball makes one an authority on, say, pharmaceuticals is open for debate.) On the other hand, *ethos* can also be established by a speaker in the act of speaking itself. Indeed, Aristotle suggests this is the more appealing aspect of *ethos*, if not more common. From this perspective, *ethos* comes from the competence, confidence, and gravitas of the speaker. When the crowds hail Jesus because “he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7.29), they are responding principally to his *ethos* in this sense. This is also the mode of persuasion most germane to our concerns about memory; more on this presently.

Secondly, the speaker persuades with *pathos*, an appeal to the emotions. Aristotle remarks, having in mind the infamous Sophists of his day, that “it is towards producing these effects...that present-day writers on rhetoric direct the whole of their efforts.” We could hardly disagree in our own time. Some years back, when a best-selling memoir was discredited as an almost complete fabrication, a certain popular television host defended it on account of the legitimacy of its “underlying message.”¹¹ Maudlin novels or romantic comedies might also come to mind. Abuses and manipulations of the emotions aside, however, *pathos* is a powerful tool of persuasion.¹² The authoritative speaker who can

¹¹ “Winfrey stands behind ‘Pieces’ author,” CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/SHOWBIZ/books/01/11/frey.lkl/index.html>. Accessed 1 March 2019. Winfrey later retracted her defense.

¹² In his book *The Righteous Mind* (New York: Parthenon, 2012), 32-60, Jonathan Haidt makes a compelling case that the emotions are themselves elements of logic (or rationality) via intuition. In this sense, persuasive appeals to *pathos* are not illogical or anti-logical but rather directed toward the more visceral logic of the sentiments—what Haidt calls “the elephant.”

also tug on the heart strings, as we say, is much nearer to moving people than the dry lecturer whose speech is merely accurate.

Thirdly and finally, Aristotle tell us that we as speakers persuade with *logos* (an appeal to reason) “when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive *arguments* suitable to the case in question” (my emphasis). Airtight arguments and satisfying syllogisms—“enthymemes” in the rhetoric vernacular—are the domain of *logos*. Aristotle clearly regards *logos* as the superior form of proof, and that every speech ought to rise or fall solely on its logical merits—and many preachers would surely agree. Isn’t it enough that our sermons are true and logical for people to believe them? In many cases, sad to say, the answer is no. Nevertheless, for preachers of the Word, *logos* will always be the *sine qua non* of faithful proclamation.

In any given speech, sermon, or rhetorical event of various kinds, one of these modes of persuasion may suffice. The parent’s authority might be sufficient to persuade his teenager to clean her room (though that’s doubtful). The slick commercial might get me to buy a new car simply by stirring up certain emotions. Or the unadorned professor might persuade her student to embrace supply-side economics solely by the force of her logic. We are going to focus on a single one of these three modes, *ethos*, as it pertains to our concerns about memorization. Needless to say, though, the most potent oratory will tie together all three—the rhetorical “hat trick,” if you will.

Memory and Ethos

We observed in the introduction that preaching with notes creates a credibility problem. From the perspective of Aristotle’s modes of persuasion, then, reading a sermon or even working from an outline is primarily an *ethos* issue. But why is this? Data on the role of memorization in establishing *ethos* is scant, but insights from other fields for which public speaking is essential may offer some clues. So let us briefly consider a couple of contemporary heirs of the rhetorical tradition—stage entertainers and a secular equivalent of preachers—to attempt to make some analogous connections to preaching.

The Millionaire Magician: Scripts disrupt connection

Steve Cohen is known as “the millionaire’s magician.” His career has been built on persuading people to believe the unbelievable and to trust the incredible. Who better, then, to convey the importance of establishing *ethos*? Though it doesn’t use the Greek concept, Cohen’s book *Win the Crowd* is essentially an extended treatise on creating credibility and securing a sympathetic ear from your audience.¹³

Cohen writes, “It boils down to being genuine. People want to feel important; they want to know that they are not just another audience.” He recounts a conversation he had with the famous television magician David Blaine. Blaine commended Cohen on his magic, but criticized him on his delivery. “Don’t prepare what you are going to say,” Blaine insisted. “People should feel like you’re talking to them for the first time.”¹⁴

¹³ Steve Cohen, *Win the Crowd* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 70.

Blaine was over-stating his case; magicians (and preachers) cannot neglect preparation. The more important point that Cohen gleaned from this encounter, however, was the need to connect with his audience and not mechanically utter prescribed lines. “Let your script drop away and look at your audience dead in the eyes,” Cohen writes. “When you consciously recognize that there are live people in front of you, the words come out sounding much fresher.” In other words, memory facilitates connection—the most potent power of *ethos*.

TED talkers: Scripts kill charisma

While there is plenty of hand-wringing from American pastors that fewer and fewer people are in the pews to hear their preaching, it is not the case that oratory as such has fallen out of favor. On the contrary, arguably more people than ever are listening with rapt attention to 18-minute monologues—it’s just not necessarily on Sunday morning, or at least Sunday morning at your local congregation.

TED (short for Technology, Education, and Design) is a non-profit that’s “devoted to spreading ideas.”¹⁵ The primary way that TED has done this over the last 30 years or so is through succinct, 18-minute (or less) messages. What started as an annual, one-off conference in California has now spawned off-shoot gatherings around the world and the

¹⁵ “About,” at TED.com, <https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization>. Accessed 10 Feb 2018.

extraordinarily popular website and podcast. Though more recent data is not available, five years ago TED had already commemorated its 1-billionth viewing online.¹⁶

Unsurprisingly, this popularity has garnered attention from researchers. Carmine Gallo is a “communication coach” and the author of *Talk Like TED*.¹⁷ He evaluated hundreds of TED talks (as they’re called) and interviewed many of the most popular speakers. While not addressing the role of memory specifically, Gallo speaks to the importance of “internalizing” one’s message in a way that accords with our introductory discussion. “Practice relentlessly and internalize your content,” he writes, “so that you can deliver the presentation as comfortably as having a conversation with a close friend.”¹⁸

Like Cohen, Gallo does not use Aristotle’s technical vocabulary. He nevertheless speaks to the importance of *ethos* when he writes that “true persuasion occurs only after you have built an emotional rapport with your listeners and have gained their trust.” A key element to building this rapport, he says, is that your delivery comports with your message. “If your voice, gestures, and body language are incongruent with your words,” Gallo writes, “your listeners will distrust your message. It’s the equivalent of having a Ferrari (a magnificent story) without knowing how to drive (delivery).”¹⁹ This is certainly convicting for us preachers, who profess to carry “the greatest story ever told.”

¹⁶ “TED reaches its billionth video view,” <https://blog.ted.com/ted-reaches-its-billionth-video-view/>. Accessed 10 Feb 2018.

¹⁷ Carmine Gallo, *Talk Like TED* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 76.

Vanessa Van Edwards is lead investigator at Science of People, a human behavior research lab.²⁰ Edwards and her researchers wanted to uncover what makes for the most people TED talks, and took a slightly more scientific tack than Gallo. Her team systematically viewed and graded the various speakers for their charisma, credibility, and intelligence. The greatest finding from their research was that viewers felt a relational connection with speakers *just as much with sound as on mute*. In other words, in terms of the speakers' *ethos*, more important than *content* was *comportment*. Van Edwards writes,

This means we rate someone's charisma, credibility and intelligence based on nonverbal signals. This is surprising—we want people to focus on our words, but this experiment is no different from previous research. Studies have found that 60 to 93% of our communication is nonverbal. Over and over again we find that how we say something is more important than what we say.²¹

We who would follow in the tradition of St. Paul, who proclaimed the gospel “in weakness and in fear and much trembling,” will no doubt want to carefully qualify Van Edwards's broad statements. Nevertheless, her bottom-line is worth noting. “Scripts kill your charisma,” she writes. “[TED] speakers who told stories, ad libbed and even yelled at the audience...captivated the audience's imagination and attention.”²² *Ethos* is more firmly established by the speaker who's not just reading, but relating.

Modes of Persuasion: Conclusion

²⁰ “Science of People,” www.scienceofpeople.com.

²¹ Vanessa Van Edwards, “5 Secrets of a Successful TED Talk,” https://www.huffingtonpost.com/vanessa-van-edwards/5-secrets-of-a-successful_b_6887472.html. Accessed 9 Feb 2018.

²² *Ibid.*

Preachers know intuitively what we have now heard, not only from the master of ancient rhetoric but also from modern practitioners of the art of persuasion: the more effectively that the message is internalized, memorized, and so able to be spoken by heart, the more credible is its delivery. If preachers would enhance their *ethos*, in other words, they ought to take to heart the sentiment of that Collect and “read, mark, learn, and *inwardly digest* God’s holy word.”²³ And while speaking by heart is not the only means to establish credibility it is nevertheless a potent one, and one that preachers can develop using the well-worn tools of classical rhetoric. Let’s turn, then, to those tools—what the ancients called the “canons” of rhetoric, including *Memoria*.

The orators toolbox: the canons of rhetoric

The journey from idea to utterance, from discovery to oratory, need not be a haphazard one, according to the luminaries of classical rhetoric. “All the activity and ability of an orator falls into five divisions,” said Cicero.²⁴ And these five divisions, or “canons,” can provide a kind of roadmap for the journey of the orator—preachers included. In this section I will provide a brief overview of the canons before in the next

²³ One caveat may be in order: preachers can of course still establish their *ethos* apart from preaching by heart—most especially by the conformity of their lives to their message. “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching,” reads 1 Timothy. “Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4.16). And as Aristotle says, “It is not true... that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.2). So let it be said: note-free preaching is not the only means to building *ethos*.

²⁴ Cicero, *De Oratore* I.XXXI §142-143

chapter narrowing our attention to what was traditionally the fourth canon, *Memoria*, and the practice of the Memory Palace.

Invention

If rhetoric is the practice of moving people with words, first you need some words with which to do it. You need *material*, one might say. This is the first stop on the journey of crating an oration, the first canon of rhetoric: Invention (*Inventio*). It's sometimes called "Discovery," and this perhaps better conveys both the etymology and the actual process of this stage: you are not so much *coming up* with something to talk about; you are *coming upon* it. "Invention," says Cicero in his treatise of the same name, "is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible."²⁵

One typical way in which classical rhetoricians discovered and developed material in the Invention stage was through "topics" (*topoi* in Greek, *loci* in Latin). In a *tour de force* chapter in his *Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle adduces twenty-eight different "commonplaces" (as they came to be called). Space does not allow for an in-depth exploration of *topoi* here, but allow me to highlight a few that are also familiar from the Scriptures.²⁶

Consider the commonplace of *a fortiori* argument. "The principle here," Aristotle says, "is that if a quality does not in fact exist where it is *more* likely to exist, it clearly

²⁵ Cicero, *De Inventione*, H. M. Hubbell, trans. Loeb Classical Library 386 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), I.VII §9.

²⁶ For more on *topoi*, see Brian C. Small, "The Use of Rhetorical *Topoi* in the Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37 (2010: 53-69).

does not exist where it is *less* likely."²⁷ You might call it the "(how) much more" topic. This line of argument is clearly well represented in the New Testament; for example, Jesus admonishes the disciples, "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more* will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11.11-13).

Another commonplace is that of defining one's terms, to "get at its essential meaning, and then use the result when reasoning on the point at issue."²⁸ This is a favorite method of 1 John. "In this is love," the epistle reads, "not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And then the corollary: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4.10-11).

Finally, we might recall the cause/effect line of argument. "By proving the cause," the philosopher writes, "you at once prove the effect, and conversely nothing can exist without its cause."²⁹ A parade example of this is in Romans 5. Paul states the remarkable assertion, "We rejoice in our sufferings." Inevitably, the hearer of this wants more explanation, which Paul offers by reasoning from suffering's effects: "Knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts" (Romans 5.3-5).

²⁷ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, II.23 §4.

²⁸ Ibid, II.23 §7.

²⁹ Ibid, II.23 §24.

As with each of these canons of rhetoric, much more could of course be said. The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* calls Invention "the most difficult part of rhetoric."³⁰ Suffice it say for our purposes here, however, that Invention is the stage for developing the raw material of your speech. For a preacher, this will be the time of translating from the original languages, reading commentaries, assembling ideas about the passage or theme to be preached on, searching out illustrative material, and so on.³¹ Once all this is out on the table, so to speak, now it's time to give it order and form.

Arrangement

If Invention asks, "What do I have to say?", Arrangement (*Dispositio*) asks, "How can I best order what I have to say?" "It is through Arrangement," writes the author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, "that we set in order the topics we have invented so that there may be a definite place for each in the delivery."³² Rather than slapping together the parts of a speech piecemeal, this second canon encourages the orator to piece them together with intentionality.

In his *Phaedrus*, Plato uses an engaging and memorable analogy that illustrates this task of Arrangement.³³ Think of a butcher carving up a chicken, he has Socrates saying. A clumsy butcher (or yours truly on Thanksgiving Day) mutilates the bird. He

³⁰ Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III.VIII §15

³¹ In chapter 3 below we will apply the insights of each of the canons to the process of sermon preparation.

³² Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* III.IX §16.

³³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 265e.

hacks the thing all to pieces, cutting against the grain of the meat and sawing through bone. The clever butcher, on the other hand, recognizes that the chicken has natural carving places. He deftly divides the bones at their joints, cuts the meat with the grain, and ends up with a much more satisfying meal.

I suppose it does not sound quite right to say that preachers want to “butcher” their sermons, but you see the point of Plato’s analogy. The goal in Arrangement is to divide and order the movements of the message such that it flows naturally for the hearers and that the different parts of the sermon fall satisfyingly into place. David Schmitt, professor of homiletics at Concordia Seminary, speaks in this vein of the importance of sermon structures, which he defines as “the purposeful ordering of ideas and experiences in the sermon.”³⁴ Such structures are essentially tools of Arrangement.

Ultimately, Arrangement helps to facilitate the function of the proclamation. It is hard enough to follow a disjointed, garbled argument when it is written on the page; you might be able to re-read a paragraph or two, and even then struggle to find the thread. When a speech or sermon is disorganized, however, the poor hearers have almost no hope of following along. At best, they’ll look for a little nugget of wisdom, knowing that that sermon lacks a larger coherence. On the contrary, a well-ordered sermon—like a well-butchered bird—is a service to the recipients and better ensures that the message hits

³⁴ David Schmitt, “Sermon Structures,” <https://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

home. Or as Pseudo-Cicero puts it, changing metaphors once more, “This Arrangement of topics in speaking, like the arraying of soldiers in battle, can readily bring victory.”³⁵

Style

It is probably fair to say that when most people hear “rhetoric” they think of its third canon, Style (*elocutio*). Cicero defines it as “the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter.”³⁶ Here one might also invoke Francis Bacon’s definition of rhetoric generally as “the application of reason to imagination for the better moving of the will.”³⁷ Style employs ornamentation and orchestration in language in order to engage not only the mind but the heart—always, again, toward the goal of persuasion. In this way Style is closely allied with *Pathos* as discussed above: if a speaker would stir the emotions, she needs to delight and not merely inform.³⁸

Given the familiarity of this third canon, we will not attempt to cover it in depth here. It is well, however, to address the principal danger of Style—one that may tempt some to discount rhetoric altogether. We might call this danger the Sophists Error: all Style, no substance. The Sophists, whom we’ve alluded to already, were notorious for

³⁵ Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* III.X §18.

³⁶ Cicero, *De Inventione* I.VII §9.

³⁷ Francis Bacon, *De Augmentis*, II.XVIII §2.

³⁸ See also Cicero’s *officia oratoris* (“duties of the orator”): *probare* (“to prove”), *delectare* (“to delight”), and *flectere* (“to stir”). *Orator* XXI.69.

peddling persuasive oratory that might titillate the ears but did not edify the mind or soul. Well-sounding words that are at best hollow and at worst deceptive.³⁹

Preachers tend to be especially sensitive to the Sophists Error, influenced by St. Paul's words in I Corinthians: "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2.1-2). St. Paul's well-reasoned and moving arguments in his letters to Corinth and elsewhere—that is, his effective rhetoric—seem to contradict his expressed sentiment; as Cicero once said of Plato, "It was when making fun of orators that he himself seemed to be the consummate orator."⁴⁰ Be that as it may, Paul's point is well-taken. In his day as in our own, there are many who sacrifice substance on the altar of Style—whether it be websites proffering "clickbait" articles or preachers with shallow self-help teaching.

So yes, the Sophists Error is real, and a real danger. Preachers should not for that reason attempt to eschew Style altogether; indeed, "plain" is its own sort of Style. The goal is to wed Style *with* substance, form *with* content. Once again, Cicero may have put it best: "Wisdom without eloquence does too little to benefit states, but eloquence without wisdom does too much harm and is never advantageous."⁴¹ When both are held together, Style is a potent part of persuasion.⁴²

³⁹ It could be argued that much modern advertising is an example of the Sophists Error.

⁴⁰ Cited in F.F. Church, "Rhetorical Structure and Design in Paul's Letter to Philemon," *Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 1-2 (1978), 17.

⁴¹ Cicero, *De Inventione* I.I.

⁴² Augustine picks up on this line of argumentation in *De Doctrina Christiana*.

Delivery

We will soon turn our full attention to the fourth canon of rhetoric, Memory, so let's jump ahead briefly to consider what is traditionally the fifth and final canon, Delivery (*Pronuntiatio*). Delivery is, as we say, where the rubber hits the road. All the hard work of developing the message can founder if the delivery is wanting. "It matters less what sort of things we have composed within ourselves than how we utter them," says Quintilian, making the obvious but oft overlooked point, "because people are affected according to what they hear."⁴³

Delivery was traditionally divided into two parts, voice and gesture.⁴⁴ How you carry yourself, and how your voice carries. While we tend to think of the sermon as what has been written beforehand, that is really only a piece—albeit an important indispensable piece—of the puzzle. When all those pieces are in place, though, the result is impactful oratory: "Indeed, since words are very powerful by themselves, and the voice adds its own contribution to the content, and gestures and movements have a meaning, then, when they all come together, the result must be perfection."⁴⁵ It is worth underscoring once more that, though our study here is to focus on Memory (and just as we saw above regarding the modes of persuasion), *all* the canons of rhetoric are important.

⁴³ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, XI.3 §2.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III §20.

⁴⁵ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, XI.3 §9.

The seriousness with which the Athenian orator Demosthenes took Delivery is legendary and illustrates how it was regarded among the ancients. Sounding like a modern realtor, when asked what the three most important rules in the business of oratory were he responded, “Delivery, Delivery, Delivery.”⁴⁶ According to Plutarch, Demosthenes would bone up on his skills by reciting speeches with pebbles in his mouth (to help with his enunciation) and holding forth as he hustled up and down hills.⁴⁷ Whether most pastors today could even run up a hill, let alone while preaching, is debatable. But we digress.

It is worth noting at this point that the Greek word for the canon of Delivery was *hypokrisis*. Initially it had the more neutral meaning of “acting,” but of course Jesus gave it the more negative cast. This verbal coincidence again cautions against the Sophist’s Error, however. Paul’s point to the Corinthians, mentioned above, was that he was not being showy or manipulative. The goal of employing not only Memory but all the tools of rhetoric is to preach persuasively by heart—not to put on a show or try to elicit an emotional response. To be sure, as Paul wrote to the Philippians in a verse already quoted, “Whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (Philippians 1.18). Needless to say, though, that is not a license for gross hypocrisy. “If Delivery has this power to produce anger, tears, or anxiety over matters

⁴⁶ Ibid, XI.3 §7.

⁴⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes*, XI.1-2.

which we know to be fictitious and unreal,” said Quintilian, “how much more powerful must it be when we really believe!”⁴⁸ So it ought to be for preachers.

⁴⁸ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, XI.3 §5.

CHAPTER 2: *MEMORIA* AND THE METHOD OF LOCI

An ill-fated party and the birth of the Memory Palace

“You need to *remember!*” The officer pounded the table for emphasis. The man he was speaking to stared at the floor bewilderingly.

“I—it’s just—there were so many people,” the man said. It wasn’t like him to be at a loss for words.

“That’s just the point,” said the officer. “Dozens of people—family, friends—are counting on you. Your memory of that party is the difference between their peace and their pain.”

The party in question had started innocently enough. It was a grand gala, hosted at the mansion of a town dignitary in honor of the local hero—a boxer who had claimed the heavyweight belt. (This was many years ago, when boxing still carried some cultural cachet.) The victory celebration continued into the wee hours of the night. The music and the dancing and the feasting kept everyone in reverie. Enough so that they didn’t notice the crack that was creeping across the aged ceiling like a snake slithering through the reeds.

Part of the entertainment for the evening was the hotshot poet laureate of the area. He had one job. The dignitary had asked him to prepare and deliver a special ode to the Boxer (no Simon & Garfunkel covers allowed). The poet agreed, but being a true *artiste* he wasn’t about to be constrained by the conventions of his bourgeois host. He took to the makeshift stage at the front of the banquet hall and surveyed the room. The guests were

all in predictable places. There was the crooked prosecutor with his paramour in the dim light off to the left. The aldermen all sat at the same table in the back corner by the buffet line, stuffing their faces and sipping their gin. And front and center was of course the Boxer and his entourage.

The poet watched some plaster pirouette from the ceiling and sighed something like a prayer. Finally, he intoned. He briefly praised the Boxer, beholding the self-satisfied grins of his crowd. But then he promptly steered a course into his own arcane idiom (there may have been some reference to Castor and Pollux). It all came off like a T.S. Eliot poem without the footnotes. A spattering of applause greeted its merciful end. As our poet slipped outside for a post-performance smoke, muttering to himself about the Philistines at the party, the dignitary buttonholed him.

“You’ll only be getting half your fee,” he said, “since we only understood half your blathering.”

“Keep your filthy cash,” the poet responded. “You’ll need it to fix up this dump.” And he stomped out the back door as the party resumed behind him.

He had hardly gotten outside the one hundred foot no-smoking halo surrounding the building when the crash came. It started with a wheezing, groaning *craaaack*. Then a succession of pops lit out as the bolts broke free from their sockets. And like the planned implosion of some blighted inner-city tower, the mansion collapsed in on itself. The poet looked on in disbelief as the dignitary, the attorney, the town hero, and all the rest were in

a moment flattened like grass beneath a drowsy Saint Bernard. In a daze the poet wandered back to his apartment and fell into his bed, hoping to forget a horrific evening.

The next day a knock came at the door. It was the officer. “Look, I was just the entertainment,” the poet protested through a crack in the doorway. “I had nothing to do with the crash.”

“No, you didn’t,” the officer said. “Everyone knew that old house wasn’t long for this world; it was foolish to host the party there. But now we need your help.”

The officer sat the poet down and explained to him that he was the only who came out of the mansion that night alive. The bodies had been mangled beyond all recognition, and these were the days before anyone could be identified through dental records or fingerprints. Neither was there any guestbook to go on, much less a seating assignment. Now anxious citizens wanted to know if their family or friends were there, and if so, which body to bury where—the devastation was that complete.

At first the poet protests. “Hey, there were a lot of people in that room,” he says, “and I was hardly there for a few minutes before they ran me out.” He lit a cigarette.

The officer dropped his fist on the table, and the poet dropped his cigarette. “You need to *remember!*”

The poet sighed and leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes. Suddenly the faces started to come back to him as he walked the room in his mind. The prosecutor popping olives into his mistress’s mouth. The city council stuffing themselves with third helpings.

And of course the Boxer and his lackeys laughing at all his bad jokes. A smirk came across the poet's face. He opened his eyes and sat forward in his chair.

“Give me a pad of paper,” he said.

Such is the (admittedly embellished) anecdote that, legend has it, gave birth to the Memory Palace. The poet Simonides was invited by Scopus of Thessaly, a wealthy nobleman, to compose an encomium for a great banquet—some say in honor of the host, some say in honor of a victorious boxer; the details differ among the ancients' accounts.¹

The moral of the story, however, is constant. As Cicero puts it:

Simonides was enabled by his recollection of the place in which each of them had been reclining at table to identify them for separate interment; and...this circumstance suggested to him the discovery of the truth that the best aid to clearness of memory consists in orderly arrangement. He inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty must select localities and form mental images of the facts they wish to remember and store those images in the localities, with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the facts, and the images of the facts will designate the facts themselves, and we shall employ the localities and images respectively as a wax writing tablet and the letters written on it.²

This origin story for the art of memory was evidently standard among teachers and practitioners of rhetoric in the ancient world. Frances Yates writes, “One may perhaps conjecture that [the Simonides anecdote] formed the normal introduction to the section on

¹ Cicero's account is the most complete, in *De Oratore* II.351-354. Quintilian included the detail about the boxer in *Institutio Oratoria* 11.2 §11-14.

² *De Oratore* II.354.

artificial memory in a textbook on rhetoric.”³ It is not clear, though, whether the account was regarded as a fanciful tale or a reliable testimony.

These dubious historical origins of the art of memory notwithstanding, the Simonides story is a helpful entree into our discussion of the Memory Palace as it was understood and taught within classical rhetoric: a system of remembering—particularly for orators—that relied on sites and symbols, places and images. In this chapter we will first touch on the place of memory within the five canons of rhetoric, including what the ancients regarded as the two kinds of memory. Then, we will get into the Memory Palace proper, its elements and practice, and see how the Simonides story illustrates it at work. Finally, we will consider an objection that may be raised by contemporary preachers, and that was already being leveled against the art of memory two millennia ago.

Memory among the canons of rhetoric

Memoria was traditionally reckoned fourth in the order of the canons of rhetoric. This spot may belie its importance,⁴ though classical rhetoricians did use a pair of images to describe *Memoria* that underscore its integral place within rhetoric generally: Memory as *foundation* and *guardian*. “All these [canons of rhetoric],” says Cicero, “are but parts of a building as it were.” *Inventio* (Invention) furnishes the building, *Pronuntiatio* (Delivery) is like the windows (“that which gives the building light”), and so on. Where

³ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 42.

⁴ That is, unless we are using a baseball analogy and think of *Memoria* as batting clean-up. But by all accounts Cicero did not know the first thing about first base.

in this building, then, does *Memoria* fit? The walls, the doors, the shingles? No: “the *foundation (fundamentum)* is Memory.”⁵ According to Cicero, it is *Memoria* that allows the structure of the speech to stand at all. All the other rhetorical work is in vain, like a beautiful house built on sand, if the oratory is forgotten when the time comes for it to be delivered. Thus, though it may be fourth in order, *Memoria* is primary in importance.

The other two main characters in our account, Quintilian and the author of the *Ad Herennium*, draw on a similar image but put *Memoria* in a different place—albeit one of arguably equal import. “Memory,” wrote Quintilian, is “the *common guardian*, as it were, of all [the canons].”⁶ In a way that calls Cicero’s argument to mind, he says that we may adequately discover material (*Inventio*), capably arrange it (*Dispositio*), and colorfully put it into words (*Elocutio*), but all of this is for naught if it is not finally remembered. “Memory in fact embraces everything which has been brought together to contribute to a speech,” he writes.⁷ Similarly, the author of the *Ad Herennium*, who authored his work some one hundred years before Quintilian, wrote this: “Now let me turn to the treasure-house (*thesaurus*) of the ideas supplied by Invention, to *the guardian of all the parts of rhetoric*, the Memory.”⁸ If Cicero envisions *Memoria* upholding the speech, these two

⁵ Cicero, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, II §5 (my emphasis). NB: we will later tweak the “building” metaphor in describing the process of preparing to preach using the Memory Palace technique.

⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 3.3 §7. My emphasis.

⁷ Ibid, 3.3 §10.

⁸ Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III §28. My emphasis.

envision it *protecting* the speech. In both instances, though, the indispensable role played by Memory is apparent.

Some preachers may quibble with this exalted assessment of Memory. From their perspective, Memory might be more like the wallpaper and window dressing than the foundation: nice to have, perhaps, but not necessary. They might even invoke St. Paul: “For no one can lay a foundation⁹ other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3.11). This is a fair point; we do not want to push the house metaphor for oratory too far. The word of the gospel is ever and always the solid rock upon which we stand. Other preachers, furthermore, might agree that Memory is more fluff than foundation, but not because it conflicts with the content of the proclamation; rather, because to them it seems to be a gift that some have and others don’t—like having perfect pitch or being able to pitch perfectly.

Natural and Artificial Memory

As it happens, the ancients wrestled with this same question. Is Memory simply an innate talent? Or can it be taught and trained? On the one hand, we intuitively grasp that it can get better or (more often) worse; that’s one reason people will often give for toiling away at crossword puzzles. And yet, on the other hand, it undoubtedly seems to be the case that some people are blessed with better capacities for remembrance and recall than others (think of those whom we regard as having “photographic memories”).

⁹ In the Latin Vulgate “foundation” is *fundamentum*.

It was a commonplace among the ancients to make such a distinction between what they called the “natural” (*naturalis*) and the “artificial” (*artificiosa*). The former was inborn, or “God’s gift,” as we might say; the latter was cultivated through education and practice. There were, to be sure, some who insisted that the natural was all that was needed. For example, Longinus wrote, “The only art to ensure [sublimity] is to be born to it.”¹⁰ Within classical rhetoric, however, there is an emphasis on the artificial, without ignoring the role of the natural. So Quintilian will respond to those who are “all natural”:
“Well, let them keep their opinion that to be born is enough to make a man an orator; but I hope they will pardon the efforts of those of us who think that nothing comes to perfection unless nature is assisted by art.”¹¹

The *Ad Herennium* discusses at length the distinction as it pertains to *Memoria* specifically. “The natural memory,” the author writes, “is that memory which is imbedded in our minds, born simultaneously with thought. The artificial memory is that memory which is strengthened by a kind of training and system of discipline.” Here we see again an affirmation that the natural memory is necessary but not sufficient when it comes to the orator’s skills. He goes on:

But just as in everything else the merit of natural excellence often rivals acquired learning, and art, in its turn, reinforces and develops the natural advantages, so does it happen in this instance. The natural memory, if a person is endowed with an exceptional one, is often like this artificial memory, and this artificial memory, in its turn, retains and develops the natural advantages by a method of discipline. Thus the natural memory must be strengthened by discipline so as to become

¹⁰ Longinus, *De Sublimis* 2.1.

¹¹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.3 §11.

exceptional, and, on the other hand, this memory provided by discipline requires natural ability.¹²

To get only slight ahead of ourselves, if preachers want to be all that they can be, then they must (to paraphrase 2 Peter) make every effort to supplement their natural memories with the virtue of artificial memory. And here, as the essence of the *ars memoriae*, is where the Memory Palace comes in.

A System of Sites & Symbols

Science journalist Austin Frakt had a curious New Year's resolution. He resolved to devote every walk from his home to the train for his morning commute to contemplating details of his work, in the hopes that he might improve his recall of them. Much to his surprise, so far he has been successful. In a recent article for *The New York Times* he lays out his strategy:

Features of certain landmarks — specific houses and parks I pass — have become loci for [aspects of my work], converted to images and scenes of my own invention. I figuratively walk through my work as I literally walk to it. For example, I associated an analysis of the time patients wait for care with cars waiting at an intersection I cross.¹³

In a nutshell, Frakt has laid out the fundamental elements of the Memory Palace.

As Frances Yates puts it, it is a “mnemonic of places and images.”¹⁴ Or as we will refer to

¹² Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III §29.

¹³ Austin Frakt, “An Ancient and Proven Way to Improve Memorization; Go Ahead and Try It,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/24/upshot/an-ancient-and-proven-way-to-improve-memory-go-ahead-and-try-it.html>. Accessed 16 Feb 2018.

¹⁴ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 18.

it for the purposes of this thesis, a system of Sites and Symbols (*loci* and *imagines*).¹⁵ By tapping into the power of spatial recall and the mind's attraction to pictures, Sites and Symbols taken together provide a potent one-two memory punch. And so now we turn to considering these two elements in detail.

Sites

In his later years, Eugene Pauly could not remember his best friends or which day of the week it was. He didn't recognize photos of his grandchildren. He would rise in the morning to cook himself bacon and eggs, return to bed, and forty minutes later repeat the task. Eugene had experienced viral encephalitis, a condition that decimated his memory. While he was able to stay at home with his wife Beverly, doctors warned her that she needed to keep a close eye on him at all times lest he wander off and get lost.

One morning the door to their San Diego home was left open, and while Beverly was getting ready for the day Eugene slipped out. Frantic, Beverly began combing the neighborhood: knocking on doors, peeking over fences, asking strangers on the street if they'd seen a man fitting Eugene's description. After searching high and low for a quarter-hour, she hustled back to the house to call the police. But to her great surprise, she returned to find him in his favorite recliner watching the History Channel. When a relieved Beverly asked Eugene where he'd been, he responded that he'd been sitting there watching the television. The pile of pinecones on the end table and his fingers, sticky

¹⁵ The Loeb edition of the *Ad Herennium* translates *loci* as "backgrounds."

with sap, betrayed him. Unbeknownst to Eugene, he had been out for a walk around the block.

For some time Eugene and Beverly had gone on daily walks around the neighborhood. The path was imprinted on his mind beneath even his conscious awareness. Thus, while he couldn't remember that he had been out for a morning stroll, he could nevertheless retrace the course effortlessly and make it back safely to his Lazy Boy. Our spatial memory is powerful.¹⁶

This is the foundational insight of the Memory Palace: humans have a remarkable capacity for spatial memory. As adults, we're able to dazzle our kids with the ability simply to climb in the car and drive to the grandparents' house a half-hour away without so much as consulting a map. (Though the omnipresent GPS is fast removing the wonder of this.) Places and spaces, especially those in which we live and move and have our being, become part of the wallpaper of our minds. We don't have to think about their existence; they're just *there*. The ancients had an intuitive grasp of this. Quintilian remarked, "Memory can be assisted if localities are impressed upon the mind. Everyone will believe this from his own experience. When we return to a certain place after an interval, we not only recognize it but remember what we did there, persons are recalled, and sometimes even unspoken thoughts come back to mind."¹⁷ The art of memory

¹⁶ Eugene Pauly's story is recounted in Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit* (New York: Random House, 2012). This anecdote may be found on pages 10-11.

¹⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.2 §17.

leverages this human capacity in order to retain and recall information—and especially (at least historically) for the purpose of public speaking.¹⁸

And so the first step in the method of loci was selecting a Site that would become the setting for one’s Memory Palace. The *Ad Herennium* provided some guidance here. “By *loci* I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale, complete and conspicuous,” it reads, “so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory—for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like.”¹⁹ The idea was that these spaces be both well-known and distinct. A large hall, for example, may not be suitable as a Site for one’s Memory Palace if it lacks distinctive areas or features. Conversely, a detailed mansion would be useless if the orator were unable to retrace its rooms without additional mental strain. The goal was that the *locus*, the Site, of the Memory Palace simply be background. If one has to think about it too much then the method is not working.²⁰

The classical writers recommend having, as it were, a storehouse of Sites. This is of course mandatory if one is to continue adding information *ad infinitum*. If, however, your goals is more modest—to keep the content of a sermon for a single Sunday, for example—you may need only a handful. We will be discussing the practical aspects of this for preachers in a subsequent chapter. For the time being, let it suffice to say that the

¹⁸ Recently the art of memory has experienced a modest renaissance among so-called “memory athletes,” as documented Joshua Foer in *Moonwalking with Einstein*. The focus of this thesis, to reiterate, is strictly its use in oratory.

¹⁹ Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, III §30.

²⁰ Some recent research suggests that *loci* need not be actual places, but may be creations of the imagination. This will be explored further in a later chapter.

number of Sites needed accords with the amount of information one hopes to retain via the method of loci.

Part and parcel in the use of Sites was also Arrangement (*Dispositio*). We spoke above about Arrangement, which is the canon of rhetoric devoted to ordering one's thoughts. Without structure to the orator's speech, the Memory Palace would quickly devolve into a cluttered closet. When the speech, sermon, or address has a clearly delineated structure, it can easily be mapped on to a Site. So the *Ad Herennium* notes, "If these [parts of the speech] have been arranged in order, the result will be that, reminded by the images, we can repeat orally what we have committed to the backgrounds (*loci*), proceeding in either direction from any background we please. That is why it also seems best to arrange the backgrounds in a series."²¹ Thus we notice once more in passing the necessary integration of all the canons, Memoria included.

Having selected a Site that fits well with the structure of the speech, then, the orator turns to the next task: furnishing the Memory Palace. Here is where the Symbols come in.

Symbols

The Site that the orator of old would use for his Memory Palace was like an empty house: it needed to be furnished. And the furnishings, so to speak, would be the actual content of his speech: the ideas, arguments, stories, and so on that he wished to

²¹ Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, III §31.

include. These elements were translated into images, or Symbols, that could be fixed in the memory. But before we can say more about this process of “translation,” let’s consider briefly a question raised already by ancient orators, and which no doubt would be raised by modern preachers as well: should I strive to memorize my speech word-for-word? Do I need to turn every last conjunction and clause into a Symbol in my Memory Palace?

Here, classical rhetoric makes a helpful distinction between Symbols (or likenesses) of the *thing* (*res*) and the *word* (*verbum*). “Likenesses are bound to be of two kinds, one of things, the other of words,” reads the *Ad Herennium*. “Likenesses of *things* are formed when we enlist images that present a general view of the matter with which we are dealing; likenesses of *words* are established when the record of each single noun or appellative is kept by an image.”²² Commenting on this, Frances Yates writes, “For the rhetoric student ‘things’ and ‘words’ have an absolutely precise meaning in relation to the five parts of the rhetoric... *Things* are thus the subject matter of the speech; *words* are the language in which the subject matter is clothed.”²³

Thus the question: should the orator strive to memorize word-for-word or thing-for-thing (or “thought-for-thought”)? While the word-for-word approach certainly has value (for example, in memorizing Scripture or poetry), when it comes to crafting their Memory Palaces a “thing-for-thing” approach is sufficient for orators. So Cicero writes:

²² Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, III §33. For clarity, I’ve altered the Loeb translation of *res* from “subject matter” to “things.”

²³ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 24.

A memory for words, which for us is less essential, is given distinctness by a greater variety of images; for there are many words which serve as joints connecting the limbs of the sentence, and these cannot be formed by any use of simile—of these we have to model images for constant employment; but a memory for things is the special property of the orator—this we can imprint on our minds by a skillful arrangement of the several masks that represent them, so that we may grasp ideas by means of images and their order by means of localities.²⁴

In other words, the orator needn't trouble him or herself trying to "translate" every last word of the speech into Symbols. This would be both tedious and counter-productive.²⁵ For most speakers, most of the time, turning things into Symbols is more than enough. So, then, how was this done?

Consider the parade example from the *Ad Herennium* of a lawyer committing to memory the details of a case:

Often we encompass the record of an entire matter by one notation, a single image. For example, the prosecutor has said that the defendant killed a man by poison, has charged that the motive for the crime was an inheritance, and declared that there are many witnesses and accessories to this act. If in order to facilitate our defense we wish to remember this first point, we shall in our first background form an image of the whole matter. We shall picture the man in question as lying ill in bed, if we know his person. If we do not know him, we shall yet take some one to be our invalid, but not a man of the lowest class, so that he may come to mind at once. And we shall place the defendant at the bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, and in his left tablets, and on the fourth finger a ram's testicles. In this

²⁴ Cicero, *De Oratore* II.359-360.

²⁵ This is not to say, of course, that it *cannot* be done at certain points in a speech. For example, a preacher may have a carefully-worded statement of gospel proclamation that he wants include at one point in the sermon. There's no reason that can't be made into a portion of the Memory Palace. The point is that to do this with every sentence of the sermon would be unnecessarily onerous.

way we can record the man who was poisoned, the inheritance, and the witnesses.²⁶

Notice the rather straight-forward process used here. Each of the various points of the case are boiled down to a simple image, or Symbol. The victim is laid up in a hospital bed, holding a trio of items: a cup, tablets, and, yes, ram's testicles.²⁷ Each of these correspond to, and so call to mind, different elements of the case: the means, motive, and witnesses, respectively. By translating abstract ideas into concrete Symbols, the subject matter of the argument is fixed in the memory.

The curious case of the ram's testicles illustrates what was regarded as the key to developing good Symbols. Yates remarks, "This is an example of a classical memory image—consisting of human figures, active, dramatic, striking, with accessories to remind of the whole 'thing' which is being recorded in memory."²⁸ In other words, the more vivid, strange, and unexpected the better. So the author of the *Ad Herennium* explains, "Now nature herself teaches us what we should do. When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvelous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonorable, extraordinary, great, unbelievable, or laughable, that we are likely to remember a long time."²⁹

²⁶ Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, III §33-34.

²⁷ The Latin *testes* is very similar to the word for "witnesses," *testis*.

²⁸ Yates, *Art of Memory*, 27.

²⁹ Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, III §35.

And so the rule of thumb for developing Symbols for one's Memory Palace might be summarized as *the stranger the better*: experiences and encounters that are novel tend to stay in the memory, while those that are commonplace are quickly forgotten.³⁰ As Frankt puts it, "The best memorizers place the most flamboyant, bizarre, crude and lewd images and scenes (and their actions) in their memory palaces. The more distinctive, the more easily they're recalled."³¹

The Memory Palace in practice

So what did this look like in practice? In a later chapter we will walk through the process for today's preachers crafting their sermons and learning them by heart using the canons of rhetoric and the Memory Palace, in particular. Let's take just a moment here, though, and listen to Quintilian's approach for applying this classical method in classical times.

He starts by remarking on the power of place. "When we return to a certain place after an interval," he writes, "we not only recognize it but remember what we did there, persons are recalled, and sometimes even unspoken thoughts come back to mind."³² Then he turns to giving practical advice on selecting Sites for their Memory Palace. "Students learn Sites (*loca*) which are as extensive as possible and are marked by a variety of

³⁰ In this way your Symbols provide a contrast to your Site. The latter you want to be pedestrian; unhelpful (and frankly terrifying) would be the house whose rooms are constantly shuffling location. The former you want to be remarkable and extraordinary, so as to stand out in the mind.

³¹ Frakt, "An Ancient and Proven Way," online.

³² Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.2 §17. He adds, "So, as usual, Art was born of Experience."

objects, perhaps a large house divided into many separate areas.” Along these lines, he also invokes Cicero: “The Sites we adopt should be numerous, well lit, clearly defined, and at moderate intervals.”³³ Most important, though, is that the Site be utterly familiar: “The first task is to make sure that it all comes to mind without any hold-up, because a memory which is to help another memory has to be something more than secure.”³⁴

Having secured the Site, Quintilian turns to the Symbols—“the aids we use to mark what we have to learn by heart.” Thus, in developing one’s Memory Palace, “The next stage is to mark what they have written or are mentally preparing with some sign which will jog their memory.”³⁵ Interestingly, he comments in passing on why this system works: “Symbols are very effective, and one memory leads to another—just as a ring put on a different finger or tied with a thread reminds us why we did these things. These Symbols acquire even more binding force when people transfer memory from some similar object to the item which has to be remembered.”³⁶ And once again he will call on old Tullius: “The Images [should be] effective, sharp, distinctive, and such as can come to mind and make a quick impression.”³⁷

³³ Ibid, 11.2 §22. Cf. Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.358. Quintilian further notes, “What I said about a house can be done also with public buildings, a long road, a town perambulation, or pictures. One can even invent these settings for oneself.”

³⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.2 §18.

³⁵ Ibid, 11.2 §18.

³⁶ Ibid, 11.2 §30.

³⁷ Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.358. One misunderstanding to address. It is not necessarily the case that the Symbol in one’s Memory Palace is actually part of the speech; in fact, more often than not it is not. The Ad Herennium’s lawyer is not going to talk about ram’s testicles; she’s going to talk about witnesses. The purpose of the Symbol is simply to facilitate recall. Much more on this anon.

Now the orator puts the pieces together, imagining a speech on naval warfare. “Let us suppose a symbol of navigation, such as an anchor, or of warfare, such as a weapon,” he writes, narrating the process of classical orators. “They place the first idea, as it were, in the vestibule, the second, let us say, in the atrium, and then they go round the open areas, assigning ideas systematically not only to bedrooms and bays, but to statues and the like.” Then it’s a matter of retracing one’s mnemonic steps. Yates comments, “We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building *whilst* he is making his speech, drawing from the memorized places the images he has placed on them.”³⁸ Quintilian thus continues:

This done, when they have to revive the memory, they begin to go over these Sites from the beginning, calling in whatever they deposited with each of them, as the images remind them. Thus, however many things have to be remembered, they become a single item, held together as it were by a sort of outer shell, so that speakers do not make mistakes by trying to connect what follows with what goes before by the sole effort of learning by heart.

Here, then, is the essence of the Memory Palace: orators translate their ideas and arguments into concrete people and pictures, which can then be arranged throughout a familiar place. So the *Ad Herennium* summarizes: “In like fashion we shall set the other counts of the charge in backgrounds successively, following their order, and whenever we wish to remember a point, by properly arranging the patterns of the backgrounds and carefully imprinting the images, we shall easily succeed in calling back to mind what we

³⁸ Yates, *Art of Memory*, 18. The dame also remarks, “The rules summon up a vision of a forgotten social habit. Who is that man moving slowly in the lonely building, stopping at intervals with an intent face? He is a rhetoric student forming a set of memory loci” (24).

wish.”³⁹ The beauty of the method of loci is indeed in its simplicity. By tapping into fundamental human capacities (spatial association, thinking in images) the Memory Palace accelerates and augments the ability of the orator to speak by heart—or the pastor to *preach* by heart.

Concluding caveat

As we conclude this chapter, which has extolled the powers and potential of this classical technique, it would be well to offer a caveat—one already made by the ancients, and no less relevant today. And the caveat is simply this: orators still need to practice.

So the author of the *Ad Herennium* will wrap up his *tour de force* teaching on the Memory Palace by advising that “in every discipline artistic theory is of little avail without unremitting exercise, but especially in mnemonics theory is almost valueless unless made good by industry, devotion, toil, and care.”⁴⁰ Quintilian is even more adamant: “If I am asked what is the one great art of Memory, the answer is ‘practice and effort’: the most important thing is to learn a lot by heart and think a lot out without writing, if possible every day. No other faculty is so much developed by practice or so much impaired by neglect.”⁴¹

The art of memory can help preachers take tremendous strides in their ability to preach without notes. It can facilitate a capacity for preaching by heart that all too many

³⁹ Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, III §34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III §40.

⁴¹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.2 §40.

pastors thought impossible. But at the end of the day, it doesn't obviate the need for devoted attention to the craft of public speaking. To be sure, this is not the "drill and kill" method disavowed in the introduction; as we shall in Part 2, the *nature* of this practice is quite different. Nevertheless, orators of every age have recognized that, inasmuch as public speaking is a skill (and a difficult one at that), it can only be honed through constant training. There is, after all, hardly a more emblematic statement of classical thought than the dictum *usus est magister optimus*: practice is the greatest teacher.

PART 2:

CONTEMPORARY PREACHING AND THE MEMORY PALACE

CHAPTER 3: APPLYING CLASSICAL RHETORIC TO SERMON PREPARATION

Introduction

We now begin our turn toward the practical application of the implications and insights of classical rhetoric generally and the Memory Palace in particular. In the next chapter we will look more specifically at integrating the techniques of the Memory Palace into our sermon internalization and delivery. In this chapter, though, we endeavor to approach the process of crafting the sermon with fresh eyes, coming at it from the question: how does (or should) sermon *delivery* affect sermon *composition*?

That this question is essential to the homiletic task would seem to be obvious, and yet is all too often overlooked or disregarded—as though the actual sermon delivery were incidental to preaching! Toward the end of his excellent homiletics textbook *The Witness of Preaching*, Thomas Long makes this point:

In earlier chapters we explored the crucial steps a preacher takes in moving toward a sermon: interpreting a biblical text, creating a form, deciding about the use of illustrative material, and so on. Even though these activities have traditionally been thought of as ‘preparing the sermon,’ **it would be more accurate, given the orality of preaching, to describe these steps as preparing for the sermon.** Since most of these preliminary activities have involved reading and writing, one final step must be taken as we go from the desk to the pulpit: the move from writing to speaking.¹

Along similar lines, Joseph Webb observes that if the preacher’s goal is to preach without notes then that must transform how one approaches the whole preaching task. He writes, “The decision to preach a sermon without notes should be made before the sermon is prepared, not after. This is because preaching without notes requires one to

¹ Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 263 (my emphasis).

prepare in some strikingly different ways than if one plans to write out and preach from a manuscript, or even to preach from an extensively worked outline.”² In other words, if the pastor intends to preach by heart on Sunday, then he needs to change how he approaches preparing to preach starting on Monday.

As we saw in Part I, *Memoria* is part of the so-called “canons of rhetoric.” These canons were not mere theoretical constructs or analytical tools; they were developed by practicing orators in antiquity for the purpose of preparing speeches. While they may still receive passing attention in a public speaking or homiletics class, they are not being given their full due—especially for preachers. So in this chapter we will draw on our previous discussion of the canons in chapter 2 to sketch out a weekly process for pastors to prepare *for* preaching (as Tom Long would remind us)³ that privileges sermon delivery.

Day 1: *Inventio*

The place where there may be the most overlap between the classical approach to developing an oration and the modern practice of sermon development is probably in this first canon, *Inventio*—the process of discovery. The reason that this canon continues to have such contemporary resonance is the universal recognition that before you can say

² Webb, *Preaching Without Notes*, 35.

³ Pastors have varying “work weeks,” with some only getting one day off a week and others two; some taking Mondays off, some Fridays, etc. For simplicity’s sake, and recognizing of course that pastors are always “on call,” I am assuming a pastor who is in the office four days a week, plus the Lord’s Day. See also Paul Scott Wilson’s structure in *The Practice of Preaching*.

something you have to have something *to say*. Preparation starts with investigation: seeking out the sources and substance of the message. This is the task of *Inventio*.

Let's consider what this day and stage commonly looks like for pastors. It's the first day of the "work week," so to speak. Pastors may make this the very first part of their first day—before answering e-mails, before putting out fires from the weekend, before making visits (unless there's an emergency)—because they recognize that it is, in Steven Covey's metaphor, a "big rock."⁴ They want to get to it before other things clutter up the day. And so the pastor sits down at his desk and surrounds himself with books: in addition to the Bible, there are a multitude of commentaries, volumes from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, collections of sermons, and so on. This being the 21st century, the pastor may also be using electronic resources like Logos or Accordance. In whatever format such resources come in, in this *Inventio* stage the preacher is like a magnet attracting pertinent material from all these various and sundry sources.

Pastors of course develop their own personal routines for this *Inventio* stage of sermon preparation. What follows is one possible approach, recognizing that each preacher's manner and mileage will vary.⁵ The reader might think of the panoply of resources like concentric circles, rippling out from the *font* of Scripture. The first circle is within Scripture itself: context, parallel passages, cross references, and so on. If the

⁴ The picture is a jar that is being filled with three elements: big rocks, gravel, and sand. They correspond, respectively, to your most important responsibilities, necessary tasks, and trivial matters. See Steven Covey, *First Things First* (New York: Fireside, 1994), chapter 4.

⁵ See also, e.g., Wilson, *Practice of Preaching*, 1-54; Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 76-112.

preacher is in a church that uses the lectionary, this will also include the other assigned texts for the Sunday. This exegetical discipline is an instantiation of the hermeneutical principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture; before we hear what others have had to say about the text, we listen to the witness of other canonical authors—and so the divine Author.

The second circle comprises pre-modern interpreters of the text, especially patristic authors.⁶ This circle is important for at least three reasons. First, this early commentary is illuminating for discerning the reception history of the Scripture, especially when it comes to controverted passages. Turning to this second circle of interpreters is sort of like being among a group of friends that, encountering some surprise, look at each other as if to say, “Are you hearing what I’m hearing?” Second, being closer historically and culturally to the *Sitz im Leben* of the Bible, these authors may help to fill in interpretive “blanks” in the text: they can help to explain or make sense of things that are distant or foreign to our ears.⁷ And third, as a matter of particular importance for preachers, this circle of interpreters is relentlessly *Christocentric*. As R.R. Reno and John O’Keefe put it in their book on early Christian interpretation of the Bible, “Jesus Christ is the crucial, recapitulating figure, and for that reason he discloses the logic of the divine economy and functions as the hub of interpretation around which the other figures revolve. Indeed, insofar as the church fathers treat interpretation of the scriptural

⁶ A very helpful resource for this second “circle” is the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series, edited by the late Thomas Oden and published by Intervarsity Press.

⁷ On “blanks” in the text, see James W. Voelz, *What Does this Mean?* (St. Louis: CPH, 1997), chapters 7-8.

texts as the privileged means for understanding all of reality, Jesus Christ functions as the hub of all reality.”⁸ Attending to the second circle keeps Christ at the center.

The third circle is modern commentary on the Scripture. Placing such commentary in this tertiary position is not to degrade its importance—indeed, in many cases the exegesis is superior to that of pre-moderns—but to recognize that being a Christian and a pastor is to be part of a great tradition that reaches back further than fifty or even five hundred years. Hearing those more ancient voices first keeps the modern ones in proper perspective, ensuring that theological and pastoral concerns—ever-present in pre-modern Christian commentary—are not crowded out by the technical and critical concerns that tend to predominate in contemporary commentaries.⁹ Both are important, and both need their proper place.

A final circle in the *Inventio* preparation consists of any resources that might not fall under traditional biblical commentary but that can still be pertinent to the preaching task, particularly in gleaning illustrative material. This may include a short story from Flannery O’Connor, an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, or a Facebook post from a friend. As preachers well know, these unorthodox (which is not to say heretical) sources can provide inspiration and a different slant on familiar topics.

So, then, in the *Inventio* stage preachers are collecting sources and insights like a lawyer collecting evidence. At this point the goal is simply to establish the basic meaning

⁸ John J. O’Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2005), 81.

⁹ A marvelous exception to this rule is the excellent Theological Commentary on the Bible series published by Brazos.

of the text(s), and what general direction to take the sermon. The final product of this process will be something like the simple pair of statements that Thomas Long calls the “focus and function”:¹⁰ a *focus* statement that sets out the central theme (e.g. “How Christ reconciles people to God and to one another”), and a *function* statement that sets out the goal of the sermon (e.g. “That the hearers might pursue forgiveness and reconciliation within the body of Christ”). Now, the preacher is ready to move to Day 2 and the canon of *Dispositio*.¹¹

Day 2: *Dispositio*

In a 2013 essay for *The New Yorker*, legendary journalist John McPhee describes a scenario that is all too familiar for the preacher: “I had done all the research I was going to do, assembled enough material to fill a silo. And now I had no idea what to do with it.” That was early in his career. What changed everything for him, though, was discovering a humble hero: Structure. McPhee writes, “A compelling structure in nonfiction can have an attracting effect analogous to a story line in fiction.” He goes on:

The approach to structure in factual writing is like returning from a grocery store with materials you intend to cook for dinner. You set them out on the kitchen counter, and what’s there is what you deal with, and all you deal with. If something is red and globular, you don’t call it a tomato if it’s a bell pepper. To some extent, the structure of a composition dictates itself, and to some extent it does not. Where you have a free hand, you can make interesting choices.¹²

¹⁰ Long, *Witness of Preaching*, chapter 4.

¹¹ While this process will of course vary from preacher to preacher (and circumstance to circumstance), for myself I generally allot 3-4 hours on Monday for *Inventio* work.

¹² John McPhee, “Structure,” *The New Yorker* (January 14, 2013).

McPhee is writing about journalism and not preaching, but his comments are still apt: *structure matters*. While the focus of this thesis is principally *Memoria* and the Memory Palace, one is tempted to assert that *Dispositio*—Structure, or Arrangement—is in fact the most overlooked and underutilized of the canons in sermon preparation. Arrangement, the reader will recall, is the purposeful structuring of ideas and experiences in the speech or sermon; or, as Plato had it, Arrangement is the well-butchered bird. This canon is oft overlooked because preachers, being human, easily fall into familiar paths and patterns of proclamation. We tend to find a structure that works and stick with it. In my Lutheran tradition the default is a kind of law-then-gospel structure, summarized by a confirmand thusly: “You’re bad. Jesus is good. Amen.”¹³

On the one hand, there’s nothing inherently wrong with this. The Word of God, which does the work of converting and sanctifying, can still be proclaimed. And if the people of God know what to expect, that can even aid their comprehension: they know where things are going and can follow the steps like a well-worn path. But this is also, on the other hand, the problem: if the assembly knows where the preacher is going they may well tune out, the way someone can drive to their workplace without thinking about it.¹⁴ Moreover, preachers themselves may become bored with proclamation, serving up warmed-over boilerplate that excites them no more than their hearers.

¹³ For a critique of this approach, see David R. Schmitt, “Richard Caemmerer’s Goal, Malady, Means: A Retrospective Glance” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74 (2010): 23-38.

¹⁴ I note in passing that this phenomenon is further evidence for the value of spatial memory and the Sites (*loci*) component of the Memory Palace technique.

Arrangement can help to address drab preaching, while also facilitating *Memoria*. By introducing varying structures into the proclamation, a single message can be preached in a variety of ways. Think of poetry. With its manifold structures and forms, poetry is able to explore the same topic from many different angles. One can speak of love, for example, in the exalted form of a Shakespearean sonnet, or in the playful form of a limerick. A preacher who only uses a single structure (even unintentionally so) becomes like a poet who only composes couplets.

Additionally, *Dispositio* helps to facilitate *Memoria* by providing a clear structure. To use the poetry analogy once again, memorizing a poem in free verse versus one in iambic pentameter is significantly more difficult. The outcome is obvious. Since the preacher's sermon structure is mapped on to the structure of the Memory Palace, arranging discrete moments and movements—like a house that flows well from room to room—is key. Open floor plans might be all the rage in contemporary architecture, but they're no help for the Memory Palace.

So, then, how does one practice *Dispositio*, intentionally integrating a variety of structures into the sermon preparation?¹⁵ Consider an exercise inspired by Daniel Overdorf in his book *One Year to Better Preaching*, which we will call the One-Sentence Sermon exercise.¹⁶ It works like this. As noted above, the fruit of *Inventio* is the focus or theme statement. The preacher then takes that statement and distills it to a single word or

¹⁵ For more on integrating sermon structures in sermon preparation, see, e.g., David Buttrick, *Homiletic Moves and Structures* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), Part II, and Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

¹⁶ Daniel Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 159-166.

phrase; for the illustration mentioned above, that word might be “reconciliation.” Then, he runs that concept through a host of textual, thematic, and dynamic structures.¹⁷ For each, he writes out a “one-sentence sermon” that employs that structure and points up how the theme might be developed using it.¹⁸ Let’s look at our example of reconciliation using a few different structures:

Analogy (thematic): Reconciliation is like a truce between warring parties.

Compare/contrast (thematic): Christian reconciliation contrasts from worldly reconciliation in its source, depth, and aims.

“*Lowry loop*” (dynamic): If Jesus came to effect reconciliation, why does He say that He did not come to bring peace but a sword?¹⁹

In each of these instances, one can imagine—if only in an inchoate way—how the sermon might be arranged using that structure. To be sure, some texts and themes better lend themselves to some structures (or class of structures) than others. The goal for the exercise is simply to break out of the rut of using the same structure over and over, and indeed to challenge oneself to employ different structures and so see a particular text in a different way.²⁰ The poet W.H. Auden used to boast that he had (or could) compose a

¹⁷ For some ideas for different structures I recommend Arthur’s *Preaching With Variety*, Aristotle’s *Ars Rhetorica* (especially Book II), and a website produced by David Schmitt and hosted by Concordia Seminary: www.concordiatheology.com/pulpit.

¹⁸ These “sermons” needn’t be exactly one sentence; the idea is that the theme be very briefly sketched in a way that suggests how it could be further developed using that particular structure.

¹⁹ On the “Lowry Loop,” see Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot* (Louisville: WJK, 2001).

²⁰ As the pastor of a church that uses the lectionary, I find this especially rewarding. One year I may preach on a pericope using a thematic structure, while the next time it comes up I use a dynamic one. In this way, the lectionary’s appointed texts continue to stay fresh—and, Lord willing, so does the preaching.

poem in any form known to man. Preachers would do well to have such ambition with the Arrangement of their sermons. Their hearers will certainly appreciate the effort.

Day 3: *Elocutio*

By now it is midweek and the preacher has settled on a theme that is the product of significant study and reflection (*Inventio*) and plotted out the development of this theme using a particular structure (*Dispositio*). This next stage, or canon, is the crossroads of preparing for the sermon. Cicero, as cited in chapter 2, defines *Elocutio* as “the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter.²¹” Others just call it “style.” It is well beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a thorough study of style.²² For our purposes here, we will reflect on one element of style that is especially pertinent to the preaching task: the need for concrete language.

Chip and Dan Heath recount the story of a firm that produced the complicated machinery used to make silicon chips. The company relied on two groups of people: engineers to create the design, and manufacturers to construct the design. Alas, the two groups spoke different languages, with the engineers caught up in the clouds of abstraction and the manufacturers thinking about the tactile realities of the machines themselves. Ultimately, the engineers needed to change their behavior and communicate at the level of the physical machine—since that was a “language” shared by everyone.

²¹ Cicero, *De Inventione* I.VII §9.

²² The standard is still *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E.B. White, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1999). See also, more recently, Steven Pinker, *The Sense of Style* (New York: Viking, 2014).

The Heaths conclude, “The moral of this story is not to ‘dumb things down.’ The manufacturing people faced complex problems and they needed smart answers. Rather, the moral of the story is to find a ‘universal language,’ one that everyone speaks fluently. **Inevitably, that universal language will be concrete.**”²³

The same could be said of preachers. Preachers are the engineers, so to speak, of this firm called Church. They have the hifalutin knowledge, if not the beatific vision. In order to convey that adequately to the people of God—the ones caught up in the physical, tangible realities of living by faith in the everyday and mundane—preachers need to speak in the universal language of analogy, metaphor, and story. It is cliché by now to point out, as St. Matthew did, that “all these [teachings] Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable” (Matthew 13.34). And yet the observation being commonplace does not render it any less true—and perhaps pastors might do well to take it more deeply to heart. The Lord was the master of the concrete word. And in proclaiming the gospel by saying “the kingdom of heaven is like...” Jesus spoke not only a universal *message*, but a universal *language*.

Happily, the Memory Palace both requires and rewards such language. As we have seen, it promotes creativity in developing Symbols to encode the content of sermon. It goes further than that, however. Wearisome would be the task for the preacher who constantly found herself needing to translate abstract ideas into Symbols for her Memory Palace. Much more effective—and, we might add, more enjoyable—is to be

²³ Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick* (New York: Random House, 2007), 115; emphasis mine.

incorporating concrete language and images into the sermon itself. Instead of resorting to theological ideas or (worse still) abstruse jargon, the preacher will find analogies and anecdotes that keep the sermon rooted in everyday realities.

For example, in a sermon the preacher may wish to address how believers are “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5.17), with a new identity in Christ. In one movement he might want to talk about how we turn away from the shame of past sins that haunt us. So instead of merely employing discursive exposition, the preacher could play with the commonplace image of having “skeletons in the closet.” Oftentimes when we start our day, he might say, we still insist on pulling out those skeletons and putting them on like an accessory to our outfit. We go about our days in dresses or overalls draped invisibly with the fossils of past sins. But Christ has cleaned out the closet; He has buried the skeletons. So that now when you start your day you recall that “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a garment” (Galatians 3.27). And when you reach into your spiritual wardrobe, you don’t put on the burden of the past, but you “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13.14).

Now, in a sense this is Preaching 101. So how does this “speaking a universal language” with the Memory Palace differ from the age-old counsel to use illustrations in sermons? To an extent, it doesn’t; good advice is good advice. The fundamental shift is that preachers *start* with the concrete instead of ending with it; narrative, metaphor, and so on, are featured rather than footnoted. To illustrate the difference, consider yet another analogy (one that, in keeping with our topic, might seem a little bizarre). Head down the

cereal aisle. One of the perennial favorites is your typical flake-and-cluster variation (think Honey Bunches of Oats and the like). But evidently many consumers lament at the breakfast table the paucity of clusters and the preponderance of flakes. Thus, Trader Joe's wised up and began offering the new favorite cereal: "Just the Clusters." They realized that the flakes are largely filler; what people want are those delicious clusters.²⁴

When it comes to sermons, the concrete stuff (the master metaphors, affecting stories, etc.) are the "clusters." That's what people remember; that's what engages their heart and imagination.²⁵ Preachers all know this. And yet many tend to agonize over the "flakes": the exposition and abstract explanation. In terms of style, *Elocutio*, what the Memory Palace encourages is, if not quite a "Just the Clusters" approach to sermon composition—exposition is still both necessary and desirable in teaching and preaching the Word of God—an approach that nevertheless privileges and prioritizes the concrete "clusters" of the message. And more often than not, when you have a good "cluster," the flakes of exposition tend to fill in naturally.²⁶

Interlude

We have rounded the corner on the preacher's week and the substance of the sermon is now in place. With the Memory Palace in view and "preaching by heart" as our

²⁴ Yes, the author has thought too much about this.

²⁵ Taking into account what we have discussed about the need for Symbols in facilitating the preacher's internalization of the sermon, then, we could say that what makes the message more memorable for the *preacher* is also what makes it more memorable for the *hearer*.

²⁶ There is resonance here with the classical distinction between *res* and *verbum*, noted above in chapter 3.

aim, the first three days have moved us toward preparing *for* the sermon and not merely in readying a document to be read. With the next stage—the *Memoria* day, as it were—we will turn to the construction of the Memory Palace. Then, finally, we will discuss how the proclamation on Sunday morning plays out, and the pulpit is transformed into the Palace. This is the burden of our next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING THE MEMORY PALACE

Introduction

The raw materials for constructing our Memory Palace have been gathered (*Inventio*). The blueprint's been established, the walls and rooms have been framed (*Dispositio*). The decor has been provided and the furnishings fabricated (*Elocutio*).

Now the time has come to populate our Palace and put everything in its place. These two steps are the work of *Memoria* proper, where the method of loci takes full effect. Then, finally, Sunday will have arrived and we'll be ready to "occupy" the Palace, inviting the people of God to dwell in the proclaimed Word: this is the actual delivery of the sermon (*Pronuntiatio*). To these latter two stages we now turn.

Day 4: *Memoria* (Memory)

Step 1: Selecting a Site for your Palace

Recall the operative principle for the the Memory Palace, which we discussed in Chapter 2. In one memory master's words, it is "to use one's exquisite spatial memory to structure and store information whose order comes less naturally."¹ It is at this point where that becomes most apparent: the practical task of selecting a *locus*, a Site, for your Memory Palace. What location should you use? And do you need more than one? To begin here we turn to a 16th century Jesuit missionary.

¹ Foer, *Moonwalking with Einstein*, 98.

Three kinds of Sites

Matteo Ricci wanted to bring the gospel to the Chinese. Ricci had received the customary classical education for Jesuits of his time, which included training in rhetoric generally and the art of memory in particular. As a method to endear himself to his Asian hosts, in 1596 Ricci taught them the secrets of the Memory Palace. His practical advice to the Chinese, recounted in Jonathan Spence's book *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, is still helpful for us today.² Ricci suggested that there were three main options for selecting "memory locations." First, he said, they could come from reality itself. By this he meant from buildings or objects that a person was already acquainted with. Second, Ricci says that your location could be imaginary: a place that you conjure in your mind, of any shape and size. Or third, he says, it could be a combination thereof: part real and part imaginary. For example, he says, "as in the case of a building one knew well and through the back wall of which one broke an imaginary door as a shortcut to new spaces."³

Let's ponder each of Ricci's suggested options. The first and most natural source of your *loci* is a real place that you know well. Close your eyes for a moment. Recall a place you know well; say, your childhood home. Now, take a walk in your mind through that place. Do you get lost? Probably not. There's the foyer, say. Then you take a left turn and find yourself in the living room. It connects to a den in the back. You come out of there into a hallway. And so on. The pathways of places we know well are etched in our memories, like the route of Eugene Pauly's neighborhood walk.

² Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Penguin, 1983).

³ *Ibid*, 1-2.

Real places—and places you know *really well*—are still the gold standard for the Memory Palace. The reason is simply that you do not want to be thinking about your Sites, but your Symbols; your location needs to be somewhere that you can pass through effortlessly, in order that your mind may be fixed on the furnishings. “The first task is to make sure that it all comes to mind without any hold-up,” Quintilian wrote, “because a memory which is to help another memory has to be something more than secure.”⁴ And so good candidates for your *locus*, in addition to those already mentioned, include your church, the campus of your alma mater, or a neighborhood park. Whether it’s inside or outside, geometric or irregular, large or small—these considerations are all subservient to the one main criterion of familiarity.

But what if, for whatever reason, the places you know well simply aren’t lending themselves well to the construction of your Memory Palace? Or what if (as Matteo Ricci more had in view) you want many *loci* so as to expand your mind-storage? We’ll return presently to the question of how many such palaces preachers need, but for the moment let’s entertain Ricci’s second suggested option for a memory location: the imagination. Already 400 years ago Ricci anticipated what modern researchers have discovered, namely, that even fabricated memory locations can be remarkably effective for serial recall. A 2012 study at the University of Alberta had participants use a briefly-studied virtual *locus* as the basis for their Memory Palace, and then apply the strategy to several lists of unrelated words. According to the researchers, “When our virtual environments

⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.2 §19.

were used, the MOL (method of loci) was as effective, compared to an uninstructed control group, as the traditional MOL where highly familiar environments were used.”⁵ The bottom line is that an imaginary (or “virtual”) Memory Palace may be nearly as effective as a real one.⁶

The third option that Ricci suggested was a “hybrid” Memory Palace: a real location augmented with imaginary details—your house, for instance, but with a fabricated sun room off the back. What would be the benefit of this arrangement? Consider an analogous situation. A family recognizes that their home is not sufficient to meet their growing needs. They love their house, however; it has the lived-in familiarity of a pair of well-worn jeans. And so rather than sell and relocate, they opt to add-on. A similar phenomenon can happen when it comes to the Memory Palace. A preacher finds himself expanding his homiletical reach—either with a longer sermon, or more complex one—and rather than start afresh with an all-new *locus*, he opts to add-on. Then, instead of learning an all-new Memory Palace in addition to the content it “houses,” he will only need to familiarize himself with a new room or two. The comfort of his memory-home is still intact.

The main point when it comes to selecting a location for your Memory Palace, for sources both ancient and modern, is that you must you must know your location very

⁵ Eric Legge, Christopher R. Madan, Enoch T. Ng, and Jeremy B. Caplan, “Building a memory palace in minutes: Equivalent memory performance using virtual versus conventional environments with the Method of Loci,” *Acta psychologica* 141, no. 3 (2012): 380-390.

⁶ Note, however, that the researchers in the University of Alberta study were not using the method of loci for the purpose of oratory but simply for memory recall.

well; if you need to think too hard about it then that defeats the whole purpose. As Joshua Foer puts it, “the crucial thing” for the Memory Palace is that a location be “intimately familiar.”⁷

How many Sites do you need?

But this raises the question, alluded to above, about *how many* Memory Palaces a preacher needs. This is all a matter of aims. If one is utilizing the method of loci in order to retain vast stores of information, such as a medical student memorizing various and sundry diseases and disorders, then a whole “memory neighborhood” may be needed. If you are Giordano Bruno, seeking to keep the whole sum of human knowledge, you need to erect a ginormous memory-stadium.⁸ If, however, you are a preacher whose aim in using the Memory Palace is more in keeping with its original purpose—to facilitate public speaking without notes—you may need only a handful of *loci*, or even just one.

Someone who is called upon to speak at a variety of churches and venues may want to have several messages committed to memory, in which case it might be helpful to have multiple *loci* to keep them all in order. This is not the experience of the typical parish pastor, however. It is fair to say that most preachers need to be able to preach by heart only the next Sunday’s sermon—and, if it’s Lent or Advent, an additional midweek or festival service. In this case, the preacher may only need one Site, which can be

⁷ Foer, *Moonwalking with Einstein*, 98.

⁸ See Yates, *The Art of Memory*.

“cleaned out” after each Lord’s Day service.⁹ But that brings us to Step 2 and the content of your Memory Palace.

Step 2: Populating your Palace with Symbols

How does a melange of biblical quotations, anecdotes, arguments, and analogies become a memorable message? What kind of alchemy is necessary to turn the furnishings of your Memory Palace into unforgettable features? This is the next step of populating your Memory Palace with Symbols, otherwise known as *elaborative encoding*: “the formation of associative connections with other memory traces...[which] occurs most effectively where meaningful associations can be found.”¹⁰ Ed Cooke describes it more colorfully: “The general idea...is to change whatever boring thing is being inputted into your memory into something that is so colorful, so exciting, and so different from anything you’ve seen before that you can’t possibly forget it...That’s what elaborate encoding is.”¹¹

Elaborative encoding is a technical term that gets at what the author of the *Ad Herennium* was talking about two millennia prior when he adumbrated the *imagines agentes*, the “active images.” As he put it simply, “Ordinary things easily slip from the

⁹ The classical writers were conspicuously quiet about how to re-use their palaces; perhaps they regarded it as sufficiently straight-forward that they needn’t comment on it. For this author,

¹⁰ David Groome, *An Introduction to Cognitive Psychology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Psychology Press, 2014), 168. See also Scott C. Brown and Fergus I.M. Craik, “Encoding and Retrieval of Information,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, Edend Tulving, ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

¹¹ Foer, *Moonwalking with Einstein*, 91.

memory while the striking and novel stay longer in mind.”¹² Thus the key, according to Cooke, is to convert what one wants to remember (such as the content of a sermon) into compelling images: “By laying down elaborate, engaging, vivid images in your mind, it more or less guarantees that your brain is going to end up storing a robust, dependable memory.”¹³

How, then, is this conversion—this “elaborative encoding”—done? Three principal strategies from the tradition stand out, which I shall term Association, Exaggeration, and Similarity. And in order to see how these strategies can work in practice, we will do some “reverse engineering,” so to speak, of a few sermon selections; that is, analyzing and imagining how, were one to be preparing to deliver this particular message, the method of loci process might develop. For the sake of simplicity, and also due to his own association with the Memory Palace, we will use sermons from that noted orator and homiletician, St. Augustine.¹⁴

And speaking of simplicity’s sake, before we continue one caveat about Symbols is in order. Despite the technical term of “elaborative encoding,” the Symbols should not be thought of as code to be deciphered. They are rather sophisticated mnemonic devices. Their purpose is not to *conceal* the sermon’s content but to *encapsulate* it in images that

¹² Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III §35.

¹³ Foer, *Moonwalking*, 99.

¹⁴ Note that, while Augustine’s sermons have of course been transcribed and published, their delivery would typically have been extemporaneous and without notes. See the seminal article by Roy J. Deferrari, “St. Augustine’s Method of Composing and Delivering Sermons,” *The American Journal of Philology*, (Vol. 43, No. 3), 193-219. There are an abundance of published volumes of Augustine’s sermons, but I will be drawing from the vivid translation by William Griffin in Augustine, *Sermons to the People* (New York: Image, 2002).

are easily remembered. The reader is encouraged to keep this caveat in mind if what follows seems unduly complex. Its final destination is simplicity, but it is (to paraphrase Oliver Wendell Holmes) the simplicity on the far side of complexity.

Strategy 1: Association

The first strategy is *Association*. To understand how this works we can take inspiration from J.D. Salinger's novel *Franny & Zooey*. In the book, Zooey is an erstwhile child actor, and at one point he recounts to his sister Franny the secret from his youth for managing to stand on stage and unflappably, unfailingly deliver his lines. His brother Seymour had told him to envision "the Fat Lady":

He never did tell me who the Fat Lady was, but I shined my shoes for the Fat Lady every time I ever went on the air again—all the years you and I were on the program together, if you remember. I don't think I missed more than just a couple of times. This terribly clear, clear picture of the Fat Lady formed in my mind. I had her sitting on this porch all day, swatting flies, with her radio going full-blast from morning till night. I figured the heat was terrible, and she probably had cancer, and—I don't know. Anyway, it seemed goddam clear why Seymour wanted me to shine my shoes when I went on the air. It made sense.¹⁵

To be sure, Zooey is not practicing a quasi-Memory Palace here. But notice what he does do, which is relevant to our present discussion: he makes a concrete connection by linking a flesh and blood person to his intangible thought or idea.¹⁶ Zooey is demonstrating the the strategy of Association. It works like this. The content of the preacher's sermon may *explicitly* reference a particular person (such as St. Paul), or it

¹⁵ J.D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (New York: Bantam, 1961), 200-201.

¹⁶ What he also does, which we will elaborate upon presently, is make his concrete personage especially multi-sensory. This is a great aid to memory as well.

may *subjectively* call a particular person to the preacher’s mind (such as her Aunt Gina). Having associated an element of the sermon with a certain person, like Zooey’s Fat Lady, the preacher then plops that person into her Memory Palace.

We see this demonstrated in the *Ad Herennium*. The author gives the example of a prosecutor who desires to remember as part of his case the victim of poisoning. So he writes, “We shall picture the man in question as lying ill in bed, if we know his person. If we do not know him, we shall yet take some one to be our invalid, but not a man of the lowest class, so that he may come to mind at once.”¹⁷ It is important to underscore, too, that the logic or reasonableness of this association is irrelevant—and, indeed, from a memory standpoint, the more unreasonable or ridiculous the association, the better.

To imagine how this might work in practice, let’s turn to a Christmas sermon from St. Augustine. In this movement of the sermon, Augustine is anticipating objections to the biblical accounts of Jesus’ birth. To do so, he develops an imagined dialogue with a pair of heretical opponents whom he dubs “Heckle and Jeckle”:

“Say what you want,” the Heretical Hecklers trumpet, “but we know where to find the birth of Christ in the Gospels. And we get the meaning, catch the drift, of the Gospel words. Therefore, we know that the Gospels themselves disagree on the birth of Christ. If Matthew’s genealogy’s right, then Luke’s wrong. Therefore, this disagreement disproves the faith. Therefore, before one can accept the faith, one has to show that there’s concord, harmony, in the birth of Christ passages.”

“My turn, my dear Heckle and Jeckle. Just how do you demonstrate this so-called discord, disharmony?”

“Well, for us it’s a matter of reason and therefore an open and shut case,” says Heckle. “But for you it’s a matter of faith, which is really rather sad,” says Jeckle.

¹⁷ Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III §33.

“Faith has dulled your hearing so that you can’t distinguish one sour note from another.”¹⁸

Augustine has given us plenty of material to work with here. Let’s put ourselves in his shoes, imagining for the moment that we were to deliver a sermon that included the ideas in the above rhetorical unit. How might we go about populating this in our Memory Palace? We think of the particular “hecklers” of the faith whom we’ve encountered and a certain pair come to mind, who for the purposes of the sermon we’ll call “Heckle and Jeckle.” We picture Jeckle in our Memory Palace, discordantly playing the trumpet into the ears of our neighbor Matthew and our cousin Luke. Meanwhile Heckle is encircling them, opening and shutting a suitcase over and over. From this we are quickly and easily able to recall that the movement is about how opponents to the faith object that Jesus’ genealogies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke lack harmony, and that for them this makes the matter an open-and-shut case.

Understand that this is not suggesting that this is the only approach to develop this content into an image for your Memory Palace—much less that this is how Augustine himself actually did it. The point is that, using the strategy of Association, you populate your Memory Palace with concrete images by associating actual people in your mind with the topics or characters of the sermon. It does not cover every word or sentence in the rhetorical unit; you may end up leaving out the bit about “dulled hearing,” or adding more about the heretics’ despising faith. The essential substance of the movement is retained, however.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Sermons to the People*, 12-13.

Strategy 2: Exaggeration

The second strategy is *Exaggeration*. To grasp how this way works, consider the classic Dr. Seuss book *And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street*. The narrator is Marco, a young boy who is recounting his journey home from school. His father admonishes him, “Marco, keep your eyelids up and see what you can see.” What he can see, it turns out, is more than meets the eye.

“All the long way to school and all the way back,” Marco laments, “I’ve looked and I’ve looked and I’ve kept careful track, but all that I’ve noticed, except my own feet, was a horse and a wagon on Mulberry street.” Unmemorable figures like these simply won’t do, as far as Marco is concerned; more drama is needed. “That *can’t* be my story,” he says. “That’s only a *start*. I’ll say that a ZEBRA was pulling that cart...” Thus the story continues, in delightful Seussian fashion. The zebra soon becomes a reindeer and then an elephant, pulling a chariot that becomes—why, a great big brass band! By the end of the story there’s an airplane, the mayor and aldermen, and various and sundry other curious creatures. Marco eagerly heads up his front steps, “For I had a story that no one could beat! And to think that I saw it on Mulberry street!”¹⁹

Marco would take naturally to the Memory Palace. His exceptional, outsized imagination accords with what the ancients advised made for the best images and

¹⁹ Dr. Seuss, *And to Think that I Saw it on Mulberry Street* (New York: Random House, 1937), *passim*.

symbols in the method of loci—the strategy of Exaggeration. The *Ad Herennium* author appeals to “nature herself” in teaching this (in a passage already quoted):

When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvellous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, extraordinary, great, unbelievable, or laughable, that we are likely to remember a long time.²⁰

The more outrageous and more vivid the image, the better. The strategy of Exaggeration therefore teaches that, when preachers are encoding the content of their sermon into memorable symbols, they do well to take a page out of Marco’s book and turn ho-hum things like wagons and horses into blazing chariots and athletic elephants.

As we have already done, let’s work backwards from a passage of one of Augustine’s sermons and imagine how the Way of Mulberry Street might have operated for the preacher. In a sermon for New Year’s Day, Augustine is refuting critics of Christianity (as is his wont) and invokes St. Paul’s words to the Romans, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (1.22):

They shouldn’t claim for themselves what He’d given them in the first place. Nor should they crow about the stuff He gave them as though they’d earned it themselves. Best thing they could do for themselves would be to admit all this. Then they could hold on to what they saw and be cleansed by Him who’d given them the eyes to see it in the first place. If they’d done this before now, then they could’ve kept their humility intact, been purged, and emerged to take part in the most blessed contemplation. But of course, sad to say, they didn’t.

How could this’ve happened to them? Well, Pride ran riot. The Liar and the Lionizer came knocking at their souls. They had this preposterous selling proposition. A remarkable new cleanser called Pride that removes the stains from their souls. Side-by-side demonstrations were arranged at purification parties with

²⁰ Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III §35.

personal friends of the Demons. This was how the Pagans developed their own rites and liturgies, promising that Pride really could work miracles. As a reward for their pride, they received the anger of God. They should've honored God, but they didn't.²¹

This passage exemplifies how Augustine's colorful, concrete language lends itself well to the Memory Palace generally, and this strategy of Exaggeration specifically. Once again, let's pretend that we were the Bishop of Hippo attempting to learn by heart the above rhetorical unit. How might we proceed? The essence of the first part of this unit is that these critics are too busy touting their own accomplishments to acknowledge the grace of the Creator. In this movement, the verb "crow" is evocative. Correspondingly, what was needed was for the critics' sight to be "cleansed" and so to see creation aright. So here, following the example of our Seussian friend, we might envision a flock of oversized crows, futilely grasping globes in their talons as those eye-cleansing stations—the ones from your high school lab—blast full bore into their faces. Or some such thing.

The second half of this unit is even easier. You imagine a pair of door-to-door salesmen—but not your typical characters. Instead, it's a fearsome lion and the cultural liar *du jour* (if you need help with this one, just turn on the evening news for a bit), and boy do they have a deal for you! They are peddling this miracle cleanser called "Pride"—but it turns out that, when this supposed miracle cleanser is sprayed, the awful anger of God is provoked (say, in the form of lightning bolts from heaven). These exaggerated images, typical of what I have called the strategy of Exaggeration, exemplify another

²¹ Augustine, *Sermons to the People*, 145-146.

method for converting homiletic content into memorable symbols. And to think that you saw this in Sunday's sermon!

Strategy 3: Similarity

The third and final method that we will attend to for populating one's Memory Palace is the strategy of Similarity. It, too, can be understood from children's literature in the form of the mercurial character of Amelia Bedelia. Amelia is a zealous housekeeper, always eager to fulfill her employers' requests. Unfortunately, she also has a bad habit of either mishearing or misunderstanding (or both) those requests, resulting in ludicrous overly literal fulfillments.

For instance, in *Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia*, due to an unfortunate case of the measles for one of their players the Grizzlies ball club is down a man and so solicits Amelia—who, lo and behold, has never played baseball before—to take his place.²² Then hilarity ensues. When her teammates urge her to “tag” the baserunner after she picks up a ground ball, Amelia presents a sales tag and pins it to the bewildered ballplayer. When she's alerted that Dick is attempting to “steal” second base, she seizes it and pronounces it safe from any thieves. And when Amelia remarkably launches a deep fly ball, she follows the instruction of her teammates and leaves the field to head home...to her house.²³

²² Peggy Parish, *Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

²³ To be fair, Amelia Bedelia is neither the first nor the last to be bewildered by the seemingly arbitrary rules and vocabulary of baseball.

The whimsical way of Amelia Bedelia demonstrates the strategy of Similarity. Amelia's way exploits the ambiguity of homophones and homonyms, translating ideas into images by way of similar sounds. This method, typical of classical orators, accounts for the most bizarre detail of the parade example in the *Ad Herennium*. The author is imagining a lawyer attempting to recall that "the defendant killed a man by poison, has charged that the motive for the crime was an inheritance, and declared that there are many witnesses and accessories to this act."²⁴ And so he pictures a man laying in bed (the defendant); he is ill and with one hand holding a cup (poisoned), and with the other tablets (the inheritance). But then there's this: "On his fourth finger [are] ram's testicles." Why in the world would that be? Amelia Bedelia is at work here, as it were, because the Latin word for "witnesses," *testes*, sounds similar to *testiculi*.²⁵ By making that simple, vivid connection of sounds, the speaker has cemented the image in his memory.

Let's turn once more to a sermon of Augustine to think through this strategy in practice. We will take a selection from an Epiphany sermon. Here, Augustine is introducing the meaning and significance of the feast day:

Yes, it's a feast day, a festival day, but just what is it we're celebrating? Just what is it I'm supposed to preach about? Well, the feast day is called *Epiphania* in Greek, which in our Latin comes out as *Manifestatio*. Why? This is the day on which the Magi are reported to have paid their respects to the Lord. They were piqued by a star appearing in the sky. Not that they knew it at the time, but the first day they saw it was the day He was born. Somehow they recognized it for

²⁴ Pseudo-Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III §33.

²⁵ As to why it's a *ram's* testicles specifically, the translator Harry Caplan observes that in that culture purses were made of ram scrotums. Thus the money used for bribing the witnesses may be in view.

what it was. And so from that day to this, they proceeded with all deliberate haste.²⁶

Let's consider this like we're playing charades with someone tugging on their ear: "sounds like..." Your topic is *Epiphany*, a strange word in its own right that has resonances of both a child making raspberries ("piff") and "fanny"—thus you might picture a toddler on its fanny sticking its tongue out and blowing bubbles. Is this more than a little ridiculous? Yes, and mnemonists both ancient and modern would remind us that this is why it's effective. Next, we recall that Epiphany means "manifestation"; cue the "infestation" of burly dudes. And once more, intending to speak of "piqued Magi," one might conceivably picture magicians atop a mountain peak.

We could continue adducing examples, but there is no need to belabor the point given the simplicity of these strategies. But would not their simplicity seem to belie their effectiveness? How could the key to preaching by heart have been right there in children's books all along? But this may in fact be the secret of the effectiveness of the method of loci and its peculiar practices. By working with the inborn tendencies and propensities of the human mind, the Memory Palace makes learning by heart as natural as walking from your kitchen to your bedroom.

Step 3: Determining the Extensiveness of Symbols

Now that preachers have begun translating their content into Symbols, they are faced with a subsequent decision: how extensive do they want their Symbols to be? Do

²⁶ Augustine, *Sermons to the People*, 182.

they need every detail to be accounted for in each and every Symbol, or will a broader brush suffice? And how many Symbols can or should be used for the entirety of one's Memory Palace? In addressing these two related questions and determining the extensiveness of the Symbols, the method is part art and part science.

The art consists in determining what details to include for any *particular* Symbol in the Memory Palace. In this respect, Quintilian offers sensible advice. Addressing those who have either insufficient powers of natural memory²⁷ (some preachers) or insufficient time with which to learn their material by heart (most every preacher), he writes, "It will be useless to tie yourself down to every word, since forgetting just one word will bring on shameful hesitation or even reduce you to silence. It is much safer to get a good grasp of the bare facts and then leave yourself freedom in expressing them."²⁸

What are those "bare facts" most necessary to learn by heart? In this respect, it can be helpful to think like a journalist.²⁹ With each movement of the sermon preachers will want to ask themselves: what's the lead? What is the essential content—the "hook"—upon which the whole of the rhetorical unit can be hung? For instance, in the Augustine example immediately above, we focused on a few key details: the "what" (Epiphany), the "why" (manifestation), and the "who" (piqued Magi). From these "bare facts" the remainder of the exposition flows.

²⁷ Recall from chapter 2 that "natural" memory is the inborn capacity for remembering, as contrasted with "artificial" memory, which is the cultivated skill for remembering.

²⁸ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.2 §49.

²⁹ See Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 75-76.

Alternatively, one may focus on the most salient *concrete* elements (as discussed in Chapter 3 above), which not only lend themselves more easily to translation into Symbols for the Memory Palace, but also are more memorable. The British classicist Eric Havelock spent a lifetime studying stories that were passed down orally, particularly the epics of Homer. In his *Preface to Plato*, he observes how such tales are remarkable for their preponderance of concrete details.³⁰ “When they were passed along from generation to generation, the more memorable concrete details survived and the abstractions evaporated.”³¹ To be sure, these concrete elements can—and often do—overlap with the “lead” of the sermon, mentioned above. Even where they don’t, however, they may facilitate learning a particular movement by heart more so than simply attending to the “5Ws.” Such is the art of determining how detailed each Symbol needs to be.

The science of determining the extensiveness of Symbols consists in deciding *how many* such Symbols are needed for the Memory Palace as a whole. Otherwise put, when the preacher was discerning how detailed to be with each symbol above, it was a matter of *depth*; now, when looking at the number of Symbols, it’s a matter of *breadth*. How many Symbols can be spread throughout the preacher’s Memory Palace? Here, modern cognitive psychology provides an assist to classical rhetoric.

In an oft-cited article, “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two,” psychologist George Miller contended that our working memory—our human RAM, if

³⁰ Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

³¹ Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 107.

you will—can only hold seven independent pieces of information at any particular time.³² Thus, for instance, phone numbers have seven digits.³³ But there’s a loophole to this, which cognitive psychologists call “chunking.” “Chunking,” according to Joshua Foer, “is a way to decrease the number of items you have to remember by increasing the size of each item.”³⁴

An example from language may suffice. Imagine you were trying to recall a string of twenty-two letters: FORGODSOLOVEDTHEWORLD. Taken on their own this is a very difficult task; twenty-two well exceeds our mnemonic sweet spot. But when you recognize that those letters can be broken into six words—FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD—suddenly, remembering them is not so hard. And if you recognize them as John 3:16, it will be easier still. Chip and Dan Heath summarize the benefits of chunking thusly: “By taking advantage of preexisting chunks of information, we can cram more information into a limited attentional space.”³⁵

Does this have any relevance for the method of loci and the extensiveness of Symbols in the preacher’s Memory Palace? Much in every way. First, chunking enables any particular Symbol to “pack in” much more information than it otherwise would; images are like mnemonic power bars, containing a whole host of content. Secondly, and

³² George Miller, “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information,” *Psychological Review* 63 (1956), 81-97.

³³ Miller offers several other examples, including the seven wonders of the world, the seven seas, the seven deadly sins, the seven notes of the musical scale, and the seven days of the week.

³⁴ Foer, *Moonwalking with Einstein*, 61.

³⁵ Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 294.

more pertinent at this juncture, chunking helps the preacher to break the long string of a sermon into several more memorable parts, the way we separated John 3:16 above. This happens initially in the Arrangement (*Dispositio*) stage as the message is broken up into several movements (say, seven—plus or minus two), which become the rooms of the Memory Palace.³⁶ And it happens again in this *Memoria* stage as the Symbols are situated throughout the Site.³⁷

Using the logic of chunking, then, within each room (or movement) of the Site another set of Symbols can be included. The result is that, rather than the sermon being limited to 5-9 Symbols, it could theoretically include as many as 81.³⁸ More often than not, a preacher's Memory Palace will in fact have only four or five rooms, each containing about four Symbols—that is, about a quarter of what is possible. The point is that by making use of chunking the preacher is able to learn the sermon by heart much more extensively.

Day 5: *Pronuntiatio* (Delivery)

³⁶ For this reason it is also preferable that the chosen Site have a corresponding number of rooms. If a familiar house or building has fewer than that, that would be a reason to create the sort of hybrid real/imaginary Site as discussed in step 1 above.

³⁷ From the perspective of cognitive psychology the argument could be made that the preacher might include up to nine Symbols in each movement (seven, plus two). Taking architecture into consideration, though, four (or less) is more optimal. This is not because four is a good round number, but because it's a good square one, so to speak: most rooms have four corners, and corners best lend themselves to the sub-movements within each room.

³⁸ Maxing out the limits of our working memory: nine Symbols to a room, multiplied by nine rooms. This would surely be straining the artificial memory, however, and limit how nimble the preacher can be in the sermon event itself. To switch the metaphor, it's tantamount to a computer's RAM trying to operate a dozen programs all open at once. It's possible, but decidedly sub-optimal.

At long last we come to Sunday. Time to ascend the pulpit; time to “inhabit” the Memory Palace, deliver the sermon, and so invite the people of God to inhabit the Word of God. In this section we will not go into detail regarding the nuances of *bonus pronuntiatio*, “good delivery”; for that, the reader is directed to the classical orators, who often discussed these nuances at length, as well as modern homiletic textbooks.³⁹ Rather, we will consider how one can prepare to deliver a sermon using the method of loci, and then briefly describe the actual event of sermon delivery.

Visualizing the Memory Palace: Preparation for Delivery

Michael Phelps is standing on the edge of the pool. He is poised to dive in, preparing once again to obliterate his competition. But before he does, his longtime coach Bob Bowman gives him a command that seems utterly out of place at the pool: “Put in the videotape!” Strange as it sounds, this command to the Olympic gold medalist has relevance for preachers preparing to deliver their sermons using the Memory Palace method.

New York Times journalist Charles Duhigg explains Bowman’s “videotape” direction:

The videotape wasn’t real. Rather, it was a mental visualization of the perfect race. Each night before falling asleep and each morning after waking up, Phelps would imagine himself jumping off the blocks and, in slow motion, swimming flawlessly. He would visualize his strokes, the walls of the pool, his turns, and the

³⁹ See, e.g., the *Ad Herennium* III §19-27; Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.3; Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, chapter 10.

finish...He would lie in bed with his eyes shut and watch the entire competition, the smallest details, again and again, until he knew each second by heart.⁴⁰

Michael Phelps had created a mental model of his race, a 3-D visual image of how it would unfold. He could then subsequently visualize himself swimming over and over again—“until he knew each second by heart.”

This is something akin to how the preacher employing the method of loci prepares to deliver the sermon. Because the method relies on the symbolic and the concrete, it lends itself well to visualization. Indeed, the Memory Palace may be understood as its own 3-D visual image—except, of course, that it’s a sermon rather than a race. Instead of imagining movements through the water, the preacher imagines movements through the message: introduction and conclusion, key punctuations of gospel proclamation, transitions between parts of the sermon, and so on. This accords with what Frances Yates calls a “forgotten social habit”: “Who is that man moving slowly in the lonely building, stopping at intervals with an intent face? He is a rhetoric student forming a set of memory *loci*.”⁴¹ Or we might say, that’s a preacher “putting in the videotape.”

Preparation to preach—rehearsal, if you will—thus assumes a very different cast for the preacher using the method of loci than may often be the case for preachers. Recall from an earlier chapter that even Joseph Webb, author of *Preaching Without Notes*, resorts in the last to needing dedicated time devoted to rote repetition.⁴² To be sure, repetition as such is still advised; even Quintilian will counsel that “the one great art of

⁴⁰ Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*, 111.

⁴¹ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 24.

⁴² See Introduction; Webb, *Preaching Without Notes*, 94.

Memoria” is “practice and effort.”⁴³ But the repetition of the Memory Palace is different: less like drilling facts for a test and more like walking through plays before a game.

Due to their vivid memorability, Symbols quickly take up occupancy in the mind, and subsequently the Site may be revisited many times before Sunday—even if it is just a room here and a room there. And since the Memory Palace thus fosters *visualization* (and not merely *verbalization*), such preparation is more easily done in the theatre of the mind while pastors are going about their day, commuting to visits, or laying down to sleep, like Phelps imagining hitting the water as he hits his bed.⁴⁴ Pastors can therefore walk through their message again and again—until they are ready to preach by heart.

Inhabiting the Memory Palace: Delivery Proper

Some years back I was attending a lecture by a well-known preacher. He was onstage without any notes or other props, peripatetically delivering his lecture like an Aristotelian instructor. At one point, the preacher launched into a long digression, at the conclusion of which he asked aloud, “Now, where was I?” And then, looking down at the stage and taking a few strides to his right, he said, “Ah, yes. Over here.” The audience erupted in laughter.

Whether or not this preacher availed himself of the method of loci I cannot say; I only recalled this anecdote years later, after I myself had become familiar with it. His

⁴³ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.2 §40.

⁴⁴ Speaking personally, I find myself able to “walk through” a sermon a dozen times or more mentally from the time I construct my Memory Palace (usually Thursday) to the time I deliver the sermon. With each pass, the movements of the Palace become more fixed in my mind.

brief comment was nevertheless reflective of the experience of speaking out of the Memory Palace.⁴⁵ Let's return once more to the British mnemonist Ed Cooke for a thumbnail description of recall using the method:

Normally memories are stored more or less at random in semantic networks, or webs of association. But you have now stored a large number of memories in a very controlled context. Because of the way spatial cognition works, all you have to do is retrace your steps through your memory palace, and hopefully at each point the images you laid down will pop back into your mind as you pass by them. All you have to do is translate those images back into the things you were trying to learn in the first place.⁴⁶

Cooke is expressing the essential experience of recall using the method of loci. It involves two actions that happen nearly simultaneously: mental translation and verbal expression. Mental translation means rendering the Symbols of the sermon into the homiletic content they signify as you retrace your steps through the Site. Verbal expression is then speaking forth the sermon from the mental prompts. As the pastor preaches, both of these steps are occurring in real time.

If this sounds overly complicated, consider an analogy: giving driving directions. In your mind's eye you picture the different landmarks and turns along the way, like how Google Maps' street view can provide snapshots with its driving directions. Meanwhile,

⁴⁵ It is often suggested that the locution "in the first place," etc. is a holdover from the method of loci, and one wonders whether this rhetorical question "where was I?" is not also one.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Foer, *Moonwalking*, 104 (note too, apropos the previous note, Cooke's pun at the end of the quotation). Compare Matteo Ricci's advice to Governor Lu Wangai: "Once your places are all fixed in order, then you can walk through the door and make your start. Turn to the right and proceed from there. As with the practice of calligraphy, in which you move from the beginning to the end, as with fish who swim along in ordered schools, so is everything arranged in your brain, and all the images are ready for whatever you seek to remember. If you are going to use a great many [images], then let the buildings be hundreds or thousands of units in extent; if you only want a few, then take a single reception hall and just divide it up by its corners" (Matteo Ricci, "Treatise on Mnemonic Arts," in Wu Xiangxiang, ed., *Source Materials on Christianity in Asia* [Taipei: 1964], 22).

you talk to the person in need of directions: “So, you’ll hang a left at Lake Street, and then come up to the Post Office on your right—can you picture it?” You are not necessarily explaining *what* you are picturing, but your explanation comes *by means of* what you are picturing. Retracing the familiar route is done on a kind of auto-pilot, freeing up the mental resources needed to articulate the directions to your conversation partner.

Something similar happens when the pastor preaches from the Memory Palace. A familiar Site functions like a well-worn path to one’s workplace or favorite restaurant: you could make the trip in your sleep. The focus then becomes the Symbols along the way, which function like those landmarks when giving directions. The most challenging part, as Cooke alludes to, is the prompt retrieval of the Symbols’ significance. To return to the caveat mentioned earlier in this chapter, though, when these Symbols are regarded more like mnemonics than hieroglyphs, the challenge is much less daunting; their purpose, once again, is not to conceal ideas but to encapsulate them in more “portable” form. The proclamation itself is simply a matter of speaking forth the message—of directing the hearers home. Preaching by heart from the Memory Palace thus becomes an invitation to the people of God to dwell in His Word, even as the preacher himself has manifestly made that Word his home.

CONCLUSION: AT HOME IN THE WORD

Summary of the Argument

We have now constructed the Memory Palace piece by piece. In this concluding chapter we will put the pieces together and see the method of loci in action, and then tease out some of its implications for both the craft and the character of the preacher. First, though, we do well to review the argument thus far. For at this point, having seen the full scope of the Memory Palace, the preacher might be tempted to think, “Is this really any simpler than what I’m already doing? All this talk of Sites and Symbols, translation and extension—it seems more complicated than it’s worth.” Fair enough: at first glance, the method of loci might look like a Rube Goldberg machine for carrying out the relatively straight-forward task of proclaiming a sermon. A simplistic response would be, “If it was good enough for Cicero and Augustine, then it’s good enough for me.” But while that may be enough for some preachers, we have seen that a much more persuasive response is possible.

To begin with, let’s recall what our goal is. It is not word-for-word memorization; that is important for a stage performer or news anchor, but not necessarily for a preacher. Rather, the goal is *preaching by heart*: for the essential message, the key images, the core content of a sermon to become so internalized that the preacher can stand in the pulpit and proclaim it without notes as though it were a Spirit-prompted utterance—which is in fact what it is. In so doing, a greater degree of harmony may be achieved between the

preacher’s deliberations and delivery, preparations and proclamation, and thus the credibility of the message (and the messenger) is increased.

In order to reach this goal we enlisted the help of classical rhetoric. In Part I we reviewed some elements of Greek and Roman oratory that are not only relevant to the contemporary preaching task in general, but also, apropos our present concerns, are helpful for preaching by heart in particular: Aristotle’s modes of persuasion (noting especially the relationship of memorization and *ethos*) and the so-called “canons” of rhetoric, of which *Memoria* (“memory”) is part. We then narrowed our focus to *Memoria* and the method of loci. In this section we heard from several of the ancient masters—Cicero and Quintilian, among others—in order to fill out a picture of this classical practice also known as the Memory Palace.

In Part II we applied the lessons of classical rhetoric and the method of loci to the preacher’s task today. We saw how, with an eye toward preaching by heart, the canons of rhetoric provide a framework for preparing to preach that privileges the actual *delivery* of the sermon, rather than just its *composition*. Then we delved into the nitty-gritty of actually “constructing” a Memory Palace and observed its value for preaching. First, a well-chosen Site leverages the spatial memory, enabling preachers to “walk through” the corridors of the mind as naturally as walking through the rooms of their homes. Then, as their sermonic content is encoded into Symbols—vivid images that encapsulate the essential details—the message becomes both more refined (like those Homeric epics that left-behind needless abstractions) and more memorable. And finally, using the logic of

“chunking,” more material than one might have thought possible is “packed into” the preacher’s set of Symbols. Put together, with the Memory Palace preachers have something like a 3-dimensional, virtual reality outline that they can experience and employ in real time.

Putting the pieces together

Thus our argument has unfolded. To be sure, we have covered a lot of ground, and inasmuch as the method of loci is more a matter of praxis than of theory it can only be mastered through (in Quintilian’s words) “practice and effort.” In an attempt to aid the reader and to review how the whole method hangs together, however, we will once again employ some “reverse-engineering” of an actual sermon. This time, we’ll use a modern example: the 2007 Christmas homily of Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury.¹

Though this may not have been the case, we will imagine that the sermon (reprinted below) was initially written in manuscript form. The message consists of nearly 2,000 words. The prospect of preaching it by heart may be daunting. How might the erstwhile Archbishop have begun to prepare for the task using the method of loci? Recall again that our goal is not word-for-word *memorization* (save for some especially

¹ “Archbishop's Christmas Sermon 2007,” <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1584/archbishops-christmas-sermon-2007>, accessed 19 February 2019. One hopes that in using as an example a sermon of the erudite and articulate Archbishop a case is implicitly being made *a fortiori* for the feasibility of us lesser preachers employing the Memory Palace.

meaningful phrases), but thought-for-thought *internalization*, which enables preaching by heart.

Selecting a Site and Arranging the Movements

The first step is selecting the *locus*, the Site, for his Memory Palace—say, a childhood home. Pretend this home was a Colonial with five rooms on the first floor: a foyer, a living room, a study, a kitchen, and a dining room. So now the sermon can be arranged into five parts, corresponding to the five rooms:²

I. Foyer

Eleven days ago, the Church celebrated the memory of the sixteenth century Spanish saint, John of the Cross, Juan de Yepes – probably the greatest Christian mystical writer of the last thousand years, a man who worked not only for the reform and simplification of the monastic life of his time but also for the purification of the inner life of Christians from fantasy, self-indulgence and easy answers. Those who've heard of him will most likely associate him with the phrase that he introduced into Christian thinking about the hard times in discipleship – 'the dark night of the soul'. He is a ruthless analyst of the ways in which we prevent ourselves from opening up to the true joy that God wants to give us by settling for something less than the real thing and confusing the truth and grace of God with whatever makes us feel good or comfortable. He is a disturbing and difficult writer; not, you'd imagine, a man to go to for Christmas good cheer. But it was St John who left us, in some of his poems, one of the most breathtakingly imaginative visions ever of the nature of Christmas joy, and who, in doing this, put his own analyses of the struggles and doubts of the life of prayer and witness firmly into an eternal context. He is recognised as one of the greatest poets in the Spanish language; and part of his genius is to use the rhythms and conventions of popular romantic poetry and folksong to convey the biblical story of the love affair between God and creation.

² Normally this would have taken place with the *Dispositio* (Arrangement) stage, as the preacher determined how best to structure the message. The exercise that we are currently undertaking is thus akin to scanning a poem; that is, determining its form after the fact.

II. Living Room

One of his sequences of poetry is usually called simply the 'Romances'. It's a series of seventy five short, mostly four line, verses, written in the simplest possible style and telling the story of the world from the beginning to the first Christmas – but very daringly telling this story from God's point of view. It begins like a romantic ballad. 'Once upon a time', God was living eternally in heaven, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, with perfect love flowing uninterrupted between them. And out of the sheer overflowing energy of his love, God the Father decides that he will create a 'Bride' for his Son. The imagery is powerful and direct: there will be someone created who will be able, says God the Father, to 'sit down and eat bread with us at one table, the same bread that I eat.' And so the world is made as a home for the Bride. Who is this Bride? It is the whole world of beings who are capable of love and understanding, the angels and the human race. In the rich diversity of the world, the heavens and the earth together, God makes an environment in which love and intelligence may grow, until they are capable of receiving the full impact of God's presence. And so the world waits for the moment when God can at last descend and – in a beautiful turning upside-down of the earlier image – can sit at the same table and share the same bread as created beings. As the ages pass on earth, the longing grows and intensifies for this moment to arrive; and at last God the Father tells the Son that it is time for him to meet his Bride face to face on earth, so that, as he looks at her directly, she may reflect his own likeness. When God has become human, then humanity will recognise in his face, in Jesus' face, its own true nature and destiny. And the angels sing at the wedding in Bethlehem, the marriage of heaven and earth, where, in the haunting final stanza of the great poetic sequence, humanity senses the joy of God himself, and the only one in the scene who is weeping is the child, the child who is God in the flesh: 'The tears of man in God, the gladness in man, the sorrow and the joy that used to be such strangers to each other.' Well, that is how John of the Cross sets out the story of creation and redemption, the story told from God's point of view. And there are two things in this that are worth our thoughts and our prayers today.

III. Study

The first is one of the strangest features of John's poems. The coming of Christ is not first and foremost a response to human crisis; there is remarkably little about sin in these verses. We know from elsewhere that John believed what all Christians believe about sin and forgiveness; and even in these poems there is reference to God's will to save us from destruction. But the vision takes us further back into God's purpose. The whole point of creation is that there should be

persons, made up of spirit and body, in God's image and likeness, to use the language of Genesis and of the New Testament, who are capable of intimacy with God – not so that God can gain something but so that these created beings may live in joy. And God's way of making sure that this joy is fully available is to join humanity on earth so that human beings may recognise what they are and what they are for. The sinfulness, the appalling tragedy of human history has set us at what from our point of view seems an unimaginable distance from God; yet God, we might say, takes it in his stride. It means that when he appears on earth he takes to himself all the terrible consequences of where we have gone wrong – 'the tears of man in God'; yet it is only a shadow on the great picture, which is unchanged. We are right to think about the seriousness of sin, in other words; but we see it properly and in perspective only when we have our eyes firmly on the greatness and unchanging purpose of God's eternal plan for the marriage of heaven and earth. It is a perspective that is necessary when our own sins or those of a failing and suffering world fill the horizon for us, so that we can hardly believe the situation can be transformed. For if God's purpose is what it is, and if God has the power and freedom to enter our world and meet us face to face, there is nothing that can destroy that initial divine vision of what the world is for and what we human beings are for. Nothing changes, however far we fall; if we decide to settle down with our failures and give way to cynicism and despair, that is indeed dreadful – but God remains the same God who has decided that the world should exist so that it may enter into his joy. At Christmas, when this mystery is celebrated, we should above all renew our sheer confidence in God. In today's Bethlehem, still ravaged by fear and violence, we can still meet the God who has made human tears his own and still works ceaselessly for his purpose of peace and rejoicing, through the witness of brave and loving people on both sides of the dividing wall.

IV. Kitchen

But the second point growing out of this is of immense practical importance. The world around us is created as a framework within which we may learn the first beginnings of growing up towards what God wants for us. It is the way it is so that we can be directed towards God. And so this is how we must see the world. Yes, it exists in one sense for humanity's sake; but it exists in its own independence and beauty for humanity's sake – not as a warehouse of resources to serve humanity's selfishness. To grasp that God has made the material world, 'composed', says John of the Cross, 'of infinite differences', so that human beings can see his glory is to accept that the diversity and mysteriousness of the world around is something precious in itself. To reduce this diversity and to try and empty out the mysteriousness is to fail to allow God to speak through the things

of creation as he means to. 'My overwhelming reaction is one of amazement. Amazement not only at the extravaganza of details that we have seen; amazement, too, at the very fact that there are any such details to be had at all, on any planet. The universe could so easily have remained lifeless and simple...Not only is life on this planet amazing, and deeply satisfying, to all whose senses have not become dulled by familiarity: the very fact that we have evolved the brain power to understand our evolutionary genesis redoubles the amazement and compounds the satisfaction'. The temptation to quote Richard Dawkins from the pulpit is irresistible; in this amazement and awe, if not in much else, he echoes the sixteenth century mystic. So to think of our world as a divine 'prompt' to our delight and reverence, so that its variety, the 'extravaganza of details', is a precious thing, is to begin to be committed to that reverent guardianship of this richness that is more and more clearly required of us as we grow in awareness of how fragile all this is, how fragile is the balance of species and environments in the world and how easily our greed distorts it. When we threaten the balance of things, we don't just put our material survival at risk; more profoundly, we put our spiritual sensitivity at risk, the possibility of being opened up to endless wonder by the world around us.

V. Dining Room

And it hardly needs adding that this becomes still more significant when we apply John of the Cross's vision to our human relations. Every person and every diverse sort of person exists for a unique joy, the joy of being who they are in relation to God, a joy which each person will experience differently. And when I encounter another, I encounter one who is called to such a unique joy; my relation with them is part of God's purpose in bringing that joy to perfection – in me and in the other. This doesn't rule out the tension and conflict that are unavoidable in human affairs – sometimes we challenge each other precisely so that we can break through what it is in each other that gets in the way of God's joy, so that we can set each other free for this joy. This, surely, is where peace on earth, the peace the angels promise to the shepherds, begins, here and nowhere else, here where we understand what human beings are for and what they can do for each other. The delighted reverence and amazement we should have towards the things of creation is intensified many times where human beings are concerned. And if peace is to be more than a pause in open conflict, it must be grounded in this passionate amazed reverence for others. The birth of Jesus, in which that power which holds the universe together in coherence takes shape in history as a single human body and soul, is an event of cosmic importance. It announces that creation as a whole has found its purpose and meaning, and that the flowing together of all things for the joyful transfiguration of our humanity is at last made visible on earth. 'So God

henceforth will be human, and human beings caught up in God. He will walk around in their company, eat with them and drink with them. He will stay with them always, the same for ever alongside them, until this world is wrapped up and done with'. Glory to God in the highest , and peace on earth to those who are God's friends.

Before we continue, it might be helpful for us to ask (as Williams likely asked himself before composing), “What is the essential message of this sermon? What good news does it seek to bring?” Keeping this in view helps to ensure we don’t lose the forest for the trees, or indeed the Word for the words. And so we might summarize it as something like, “The message of Christmas, as St. John of the Cross helps us to see, is that God became man in order not only to deal with sin, but also and even more so to bring about the joyful marriage between God and creation.” Thus, as we continue, we will want to make certain that this focus of the sermon not be lost.

Discerning the core content for each movement

Next, with our journalist’s eye³ it will be helpful to simplify and outline the core content of the sermon, arranging each “sub-movement” within the rooms of our Memory Palace.

I. Foyer

- i. The Church just celebrated the 16th century Spanish saint & mystical writer John of the Cross, who worked for monastic reform & the purification of the Christian’s inner life.

³ See the section “Determining the extensiveness of Symbols” in chapter 4 above.

- ii. Known best for “the dark night of the soul,” he ruthlessly analyzed how we humans settle for less than God’s true joy.
- iii. Therefore, John is not whom you’d expect to find bringing Christmas cheer, but in some of his poems he paints an imaginative picture of Christmas joy.
- iv. With the help of conventional romantic poetry & folksong, he depicted the biblical story as a love affair.

II. Living room

- i. John’s poems called “the Romances” include 75 short verses that tell the biblical story as a romantic ballad from God’s point of view.
- ii. God says in these poems that He will make as a home for His Bride the world in all its rich diversity.
- iii. The world awaits the day when God will break bread with humanity, until at long last the Son is sent and humanity can see its own nature and destiny in His face.
- iv. The angels sing at the “wedding” in Bethlehem, and the Christ child weeps for sorrow and joy—thus concludes John’s poem, which prompts two reflections.

III. Study

- i. The 1st reflection: Christ's coming isn't primarily in response to sin, though John believed in the need for forgiveness.
- ii. The whole point of creation: people capable of joyous intimacy with God—thus the Incarnation, with God taking sin in stride.
- iii. We see sin aright when we see it through the lens of God's unchanging nuptial purpose—especially necessary when sin clouds our vision.
- iv. Therefore, at Christmas we should renew our confidence in God, despite the continued ravaging of Bethlehem.

IV. Kitchen

- i. The 2nd reflection: God made the world the way that it is *not* as a warehouse of resources to serve human selfishness, *but* so that our lives might be directed toward Him.
- ii. Richard Dawkins quote: “My overwhelming reaction is one of amazement...”⁴
- iii. Such awe, which echoes John of the Cross, encourages our reverent guardianship of God's rich but fragile creation.

⁴ I personally recommend *not* learning by heart quotations to be used in a sermon (other than from the Bible), for two reasons. First, the necessary word-for-word memorization takes enormous energy and goes beyond the strong suits of the method of loci. Secondly, and paradoxically, to recite another author's words by heart may actually create a credibility gap with the assembly, since it gives more a sense of the sermon being a performance rather than a proclamation. And not to put too fine a point on it, but if you were to recite a passage of Richard Dawkins from memory the congregation would probably think you're just plain weird.

iv. Therefore, if we threaten this fragile balance we endanger *not only* our material survival *but also* our spiritual sensitivity.

V. Dining room

i. John's vision [of the divine marriage to creation] also impacts our human relationships, because each human is made for a unique joy in relation to God.

ii. This doesn't rule out unavoidable tension and conflict, but rather highlights our need for the peace that the angels promise to the shepherds.

iii. Jesus' birth announces that all things in creation are flowing together for our joyful transfiguration.

iv. John of the Cross quote: "So God henceforth will be human..." and glory be.

We have thus distilled the sermon into five movements that each comprise three or four sub-movements, which themselves convey the core content of the section. Now comes the key step of the method of loci: encoding this content into Symbols that can serve as vivid mnemonics for the preacher. As we have noted, this stage is often very subjective and personal; what calls something to mind for one person will be meaningless to another. We can nevertheless make a generic effort, recalling the three strategies for Symbol development detailed in Chapter 4: Association, Exaggeration, and Similarity.

And most of all: the stranger the better.⁵ So let us step into the Colonial fun house that used to be known as Rowan Williams’s imaginary childhood home.⁶

Encoding the content: a trip through the Memory Palace

You enter the Foyer and are startled to find John Travolta, carrying a cross and trampling on a monk’s habit. He’s got a gallon of bleach in his hand and periodically takes a swig. When he’s not drinking he’s brushing, painting a Thomas Kinkade-esque Christmas scene.⁷ Meanwhile, Christian Bale—the Dark Knight himself!—is berating a child playing in a mud puddle. (Don’t worry, you’ll soon learn that the mud puddle in your Foyer is the least of your worries.) And just when it can’t get any stranger, suddenly the two men take up Bibles and begin dancing to *Hava Nagila*.⁸

Unsettled, if a little intrigued, you make your way into the Living Room. And, I’ll be—if it isn’t Morgan Freeman, intoning verses from the Song of Songs as he makes

⁵ These Symbols are most effectively recalled when they are arranged either according to *spatial* logic, in serial fashion in the rooms of one’s Memory Palace (in corners, along walls, etc.); or according to *narrative* logic, so that one Symbol interacts with or leads to the next. The latter approach will be in evidence in the example below.

⁶ And to make sense of it all, follow the running commentary here in the footnotes.

⁷ Travolta carrying a cross conjures up John of the Cross. He is trampling on a habit as an indicator of his work to reform the monasteries, and drinking bleach to suggest inner purification. He unexpectedly paints a glowing scene of Christmas joy.

⁸ The Dark Knight of course refers to John’s “dark night of the soul”; the comment about the kid in the mud puddle is inspired by C.S. Lewis’s famous paragraph in “The Weight of Glory”: “If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” Finally, the Bible-toting dancing duo hearkens back to John using folksong to depict the biblical story as a love affair.

himself at home on an oversized map-quilt covered with a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables.⁹ You step toward the blanket, when suddenly Jim Caviezel drops from the ceiling with baguettes in both hands. He breaks them over his knee and then grabs you by both cheeks. As you are looking deeply into his eyes, those peepers turn into Magic 8 balls. Just then an angelic chorus starts belting out “Gloria in Excelsis Deo,” and Caviezel weeps tears of joy.¹⁰

You tear yourself away from the *Passion of the Christ* actor and flee to the Study. What to your wondering eyes should appear but an overwhelming stack of steaks: ribeyes and t-bones as far as the eye can see (or can be fit into your already cramped Study). Wading through the meat-mountain, you’re struggling to discern what this is all about when you come across Morgan again—this time, cuddling with a glee club.¹¹ He hands you a pair of sunglasses and asks you read the eye test on the wall (didn’t notice that before). At first your vision is cloudy, but when you protest he snaps his fingers and you suddenly can see, with more confidence than ever before, a wedding scene just around the corner.¹²

⁹ Morgan Freeman has played God in enough movies that he comes to mind when thinking of a persona to signify the Most High. Song of Songs are like a romantic ballad in their own right, and his fruit-covered map-blanket suggests how God makes a home of the world with all its rich diversity.

¹⁰ Talk about being typecast: Jim Caviezel is henceforth the Hollywood Savior. His arrival signifies the Son storming into the world and reflecting humanity’s destiny (symbolized by the Magic 8 ball) in His face.

¹¹ The piles of steaks suggest Incarnation: the Word *becoming flesh* and dwelling among us. And what is the significance of this Incarnation? The joyous intimacy of God with humanity, symbolized by a glee club snuggling with our aforementioned stand-in for Almighty God.

¹² Morgan gives you sunglasses to remind you of the lens through which you see God’s nuptial purpose—when it’s not clouded with sin, that is. His finger-snap suggests the ease with which He deals with sin, and enables your newly-confident vision.

Elated, you zip into the Kitchen. There are boxes upon boxes of food: cereal, pasta, cookies, and more. At first glance it just looks like a disorganized warehouse. But then you realize: those are steps, steps that climb upward *toward a bright light*...¹³ Your reverie is interrupted by, of all people, Richard Dawkins. His echoing voice sounds a whole lot like John Travolta. He is wearing a full coat of mail and zealously defending the great stack of boxes, which you now realize are poised rather precariously; to fall from them would not only hurt your body but also block your vision of that glorious sight.¹⁴

But then the light shifts into your Dining Room. As you step over the threshold, a stunning image greets you: a joyous, raucous wedding. Our old friend Morgan Freeman is there, looking longingly at...a giant globe? There's a great crowd as well, more people than you would ever have thought could fit into your dining room.¹⁵ ("Do I have enough placemats?" you briefly wonder, then dismiss the thought.) They are getting testy. A spat starts to break out. But then the angels return and cast a blazing spotlight on the putative Bride and Groom. It's a peace sign. You're marveling at the beauty and mystery and strangeness of it all, when the floor opens up and everyone—Morgan and Jim and the glee club and even Richard—start flowing toward the front door like a rushing river. As

¹³ The piled-high boxes are indicative of creation's bounty, as you come to recognize it's not a warehouse but a pointer to God, a stairway to heaven (Zeppelin could thus plausibly have a case for being in this Memory Palace as well).

¹⁴ Dawkins is a natural addition due to his explicit presence in the sermon, and his Monty Python-style garb symbolizes his zealous guardianship of the fragile balance in creation.

¹⁵ Here is the wedding already intimated throughout the sermon: a marriage of Morgan (of course) and an oversized globe to suggest creation. The crowd of people calls our attention to the fact that this union affects our human relations.

they do, you notice that one and all are being transformed—yea, transfigured—into something like a great and glorious apostolic band.¹⁶ As you are about to be swept out of the house, John Travolta stands up and declares,

“So God henceforth will be human, and human beings caught up in God. He will walk around in their company, eat with them and drink with them. He will stay with them always, the same for ever alongside them, until this world is wrapped up and done with.”

And all God’s people said, Amen.

Responding to objections

Let us briefly address a few objections that may be raised here in conclusion.

First, the objection that is more a confusion: no, the above paragraphs do not themselves constitute the sermon. They are rather the mnemonic structure of the sermon, its “virtual reality outline.” Rowan Williams ought not be talking about John Travolta and Morgan Freeman to his congregation; these oddities remain safely in the mind of the preacher.

Secondly, someone might object that adapting the sermon in this way strips much of the poetry and literary quality of the homily. Although this might be the case to a certain extent, two responses can be made. First, inasmuch as analogy, metaphor, and simile are the stock and trade of poetry, the method of loci—with its emphasis on concrete imagery—helps to *accentuate* the sermon’s poetic qualities. If anything, it’s the prosaic features that are pruned away, not the poetic. Secondly, while Rowan Williams’s

¹⁶ The uneasy relations betoken the “unavoidable tension and conflict” Williams speaks of, with the angelic spotlight symbolizing the highlighted peace. Finally, the open floor and flowing through recall how all things in creation are “flowing together” toward our “joyful transfiguration.”

sermons undoubtedly read well as literature and so, unsurprisingly, have often been published, we mustn't forget that the sermon is not first and foremost a literary event but a verbal one. (As Luther would say, the Church is a *Mundhaus*, "mouth-house," not a "pen-house.") And moreover, it is no slight to say that your average parish pastor is no Rowan Williams; better to focus on proclaiming faithful and engaging messages by heart week by week rather than composing literary masterpieces.

And finally, to the recurring objection (noted in this chapter's introduction and elsewhere) that this process is unnecessarily complicated, consider the fact that we have attempted to adapt another preacher's quite dense and detailed sermon manuscript retroactively into a Memory Palace. This exercise has been done for illustrative purposes and does not reflect the normal process for preparing to preach using the method of loci. That being said, creative narrative flourishes aside, the Memory Palace that we have constructed for Williams's sermon is deceptively straight-forward: it is a set of characters (John Travolta, Morgan Freeman, et al.) doing ridiculous things (cuddling with a glee club, defending a stack of cereal boxes, etc.) in a familiar location. Their purpose is simply to summon up the already-prepared content of the sermon—and note well, it will almost certainly be easier to recall one's own Symbols and their meaning rather than those of someone else (such as this author). The essentials of the method are simple, even if their embellishments might give the impression that it's otherwise.

Why I am not persuasive

In a provocative short essay for *Homiletic* entitled “Why I am not persuasive,” Richard Lischer asks a question that raises an important issue for us in concluding this thesis.¹⁷ “Why would anyone wish *not* to be persuasive,” asks Lischer, “especially a preacher, of all people, whose success depends on his or her ability to win an audience?” He goes on to invoke the Parable of the Sower—in particular the pure prodigality of the Sower, casting the seed of the Word hither and yon without discretion. Little about the parable suggests that any potency belongs to the preacher. Thus, Lischer writes, “To insist on ‘persuasion’ as a paradigm for the sowing and germination of the word of God simply does not do justice to the environment in which we live and minister.”¹⁸ This is a necessary qualification for any discussion of rhetoric in preaching, such as this thesis has advanced.

But Lischer makes an additional point that is closer to the heart of the concerns that animated this thesis, and takes us back to where we started. He writes,

It occurred to me that over the years I have not seen any preacher improve dramatically by focusing on persuasion either as a technique or a goal. I have seen no preachers change - really change - by working on their imagery or seeking the perfect glass slipper of form. The transformations I have witnessed occurred in those who caught fire in other ways, who, for example, surrendered themselves to the Holy Spirit, or renewed their devotion to Christ, or gave themselves to some practice of ministry only to be surprised by renewal...Mysteriously, they all became changed preachers!¹⁹

The Memory Palace is a technique, a tool, and the foregoing argument of this thesis has sought to establish its value for preachers. But Lischer’s comments return us to

¹⁷ Richard Lischer, “Why I Am Not Persuasive,” *Homiletic* 26 (1999:13-16).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 15-16.

an assertion and assumption stated in the Introduction: that preachers actually believe what they preach—that their own hearts are so gripped by the good news that they desire to speak it forth in a way that does justice to its truth not only in their lives, but in the world.

If the preacher does not share that core conviction, no amount of classical rhetoric or clever mnemonics will help him to preach by heart. But if, on the other hand, the preacher does in fact make his home in the Word of God, inhabits the good news of Christ risen to renovate the hearts of humanity through the power of the Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel, and therefore desires to preach by heart more faithfully, thus leading the people of God similarly to be at home in that Word, then this preacher knows of no better method to reach that goal than the Memory Palace. My hope is that the reader is likewise persuaded.

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BIOGRAPHY

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