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Lessons learned from long-time preaching

In addition to working with a variety of businesses, nonprofits and ministry organizations, I am privileged to speak at a church most Sundays. Some people perfect tying flies. Others become more proficient at Italian cooking. For me the lifelong hobby has been the art of oratory. Lately I've been reflecting on some lessons learned along the way. Here is the list:

1. To be seen as an authoritative preacher, one must earn it over and over again. Even then it still doesn't mean the preacher will be listened to. It is good to be forced to earn this privilege to speak. Thinking one is entitled to the role puts the speaker in the way of the message.
2. To function as an authoritative preacher, it must center on the Word. Here is how I've learned to think about it: *If the preacher's word is the Word, that preacher will not fail to have a word.*
3. Preaching happens inside a specific place and time, at an intersection of the Word and the life experiences of the audience. Giving the same talk to a different audience makes for bad preaching.
4. One sermon by itself rarely makes a difference. More often, it is the arc of preaching over time from a person of integrity to open hearts. People are more likely to remember a preacher's themes and who the preacher was than they are any individual sermon.
5. (related to number 4) There is no arc of preaching without excellent individual sermons.

Perhaps these insights connect to the management talks and annual reports, and all other communication laid upon the organizational leader. The privilege to be in the role is one that must be repeatedly earned--earned by the hard work of knowing who you are working with and what they need.

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