

Homilies that Spark

by

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Effective writers employ sharp nouns and fast verbs. So must preachers. Specific qualities that make popular writing...well...popular: 1) Direct Address; 2) Vivid Scenes, 3) Tension.

Listeners benefit when preachers grab a page from a writer's book.

Direct Address

Sample A: *A severe drought gripped the land. The people requested Elijah to petition the Lord.*

Sample B: *Ask a farmer what he'd say to Elijah. Better yet, ask him on a day the combine breaks down and the temperature hit ninety. Why, he'd come at the prophet shaking his fist. "Rain? Where've you've been? We needed rain months ago!"*

Vivid Scenes

Sample A: *The Resurrection narratives employ various techniques to convey the physical reality of the gloried body of Jesus.*

Sample B: *Mary clung to him. Thomas ran a finger across his scars. The disciples watched in awe as he ate a piece of fish. It was him! You get it? You follow what I'm saying? I'm that No Pack of Wild Dogs had dragged the remains of the tortured body off to the woods!*

Tension

Sample A: *Paul's companions failed to support him when he was summoned to court. He found solace in the Lord instead.*

Sample B: *The door opens on the chamber. The crowd gawks. In the back, a heckler. Paul stops, cranes his neck. Alexander. He said he'd be here. The guard grips his shoulder, 'Move!'*

Another man glares at Paul, spits.

Rufus, I need you! where are you? Paul cranes his neck. Luke, where are you? A hard shove, Paul trips, falls on the marble floor. The guard yanks him to his feet.

Paul's eyes search the faces. Alone. He's all alone.