


Take this test

Next time you listen to a sermon, write down how long it took, then jot down afterwards three lists. List A is what you remember from the sermon. List B is what you heard for the first time in that sermon. List C is how your life was transformed by that sermon. I hope that all three of your lists are long. If they are not, perhaps it is worth persisting in thinking about how we might have more fruitful times of engagement with the Living Word.



List A:
What I remember

List B:
First time info

List C:
How my life's transformed

Adults in church have become accustomed to being preached to. We have slowly become used to one person speaking in strange, lengthy monologues – often leaving preacher and listener unchallenged, and largely disengaged.

If we are really honest, we will admit that our attention drifts a few times, even in the most lively and compelling sermons. If we don't get and retain every word, we aren't surprised or shocked or disgruntled. We are happy to settle for a great deal less than the preacher has prepared for us. And yet we carry a mythology of 'meaty' teaching; something more complex or advanced than what we imagine is happening for our children.

What is Adult Food?

I am sitting in McDonalds (I use their free wifi on holidays) and the place is full. There are half a dozen children here, a dozen or so teenagers – but the majority of consumers are over the age of thirty. This is not children's food – mostly because many parents recognise that it is not healthy food.

Adult food is usually characterised by the exotic, the rich, the decadent. Children's food by distinction is plain and 'basic', in the sense that foods are less processed, or more simply combined. On the whole children's food is designed for health. Plain rice, pasta, bread, fruit and steamed vegies.

We would all do better to eat by the standards we would hope for our children.

What might this look like in our faith communities, thinking about our engagement with the Bible as 'food'? Good food is good food, regardless of your age.

As we endeavour to gather with all ages together, we want good food for everyone.

In the multi-age gathering there are some helpful expectations to encourage.

- The value of opening the Bible together is that as we do this together,
- **God speaks to us** -
Not so much individually, though this of course happens, but together we are searching for what God is saying to us as a community.
- One of the goals of opening the Bible in community is that we will be blessed by the process of **working the text for ourselves**. Teachers will readily affirm that the strongest forms of learning come through the questions we ask ourselves, and the organic processes that we undertake, more than through 'flat' presentations of one dimensional statements.
- We need to **consider possibilities**, **test some theories**, **give our attention carefully** to the **nuances and details** as well as the **big picture** of the text.
- 'Preaching' as a monologue is best put to one side, and saved for our politicians and sales staff. (Apologies to those professions).
- The role of "teaching pastor" (and this person may not be the 'senior minister' of the church – there may be someone less gifted in leadership, but more dynamic in working a text with a group of people) is to open the Bible and allow the gathering to wrestle with what God may be saying. A teacher may suggest some conclusions. The role of teacher is to provide the strategies and methods, the materials and tools to support us, but the heart of our endeavour is to do the work ourselves.
- This is so important if we are to be
people who are shaped by the word
and
people who are confident tellers of our story.

If the preacher monologues articulately week after week, he or she is getting in lots of practice at telling the goodnews. However, the great majority of the family of God are not getting any practice time! How then can we realistically expect to emerge into the week equipped and ready for 'goodnewsing?'