

Preaching to the Camera: Insights and best practices (May 2020)

Rev. Dr. Bruce Humphrey was preaching pastor at Rancho Bernardo Community Presbyterian for 17 years. During that time the church developed its on-line sermons and café worship exclusively using video sermons while still holding several weekend services in the sanctuary. Over the years Dr. Humphrey worked with various professionals on video presence. Here are some helpful insights for those new to preaching to the camera.

- 1) Ask the person shooting your sermon to choose an angle that brings your upper body and face into clear focus. Distant shots don't work for most sermons. If you have lots of hand motions you might choose a bit further away, but don't let the camera make you too small. If you do this right, many of your video viewers will actually say they prefer the video sermon to regular worship experience because you are so up close and personal. They read your eyes and expressions in ways they normal miss.
- 2) Watch your language. Be careful for words and expressions that cause the viewer to feel distanced. "This morning"... what if they are watching in the afternoon or evening from home? Instead use "This week we are reading the scripture..." "This week I read about..." They may be watching a month later. Instead use "Recently I heard about..." Become aware of how you may be excluding on-line viewers without meaning to.
- 3) Address the viewer directly. "I am talking to you through the camera" is an effective way to remind them you know they are there. "Hit pause and look this up for yourself on your phone..." means you are aware they are using modern technology. "You can go ahead and fast forward this part if you already know about the Babylonian Captivity..." you know they are making a choice to watch and stay with you.
- 4) Don't close your eyes during prayer and don't read the prayer. Look into the camera as you pray. They are watching you even during prayer.
- 5) Invite the viewers to do something responsive. "Raise your hand if you ever..." and then say, "Come on I know some of you aren't doing it, join in." Have fun during recording. Occasional comments like "Can we cut this part?" help keep it real.
- 6) Dress in solid colors. I still don't get why this is important but all the TV professionals picked out my preaching wardrobe for me. So I guess it makes a difference.

Bruce