

24<sup>th</sup> February 2024

## Passion

**"Go forth and preach impostures to the world,  
But give them truth to build on."**

Dante Alighieri, *Vision of Paradise*

John Hall, pastor of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote much on the art, content and purpose of preaching. He once told the following story:

*A leading Welsh minister – Welsh ministers are, I think, among the best preachers – was invited to preach an anniversary sermon before one of the great societies in London. Naturally anxious to disregard no propriety, he consulted the proper authority, the secretary. "Should I read my sermon?" "Oh, it is no matter, only bring some of your Welsh fire with you" "But you cannot, my dear sir, carry fire on paper." "No, that is true; but you may use the paper to kindle the fire."*

The best of preaching, therefore, must be offered with some kind of burning fire. This doesn't imply fiery oratory as might have been the style of a preacher of a bygone age. But implicit is the need for passion, a personal confidence in the material being delivered, and a fundamental belief in the importance of it to those who will be its recipients. Such passion is rooted in sincerity, not in performance.

Alongside that, there is this thought. The great 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptist preacher, scholar and writer, Charles Spurgeon, once wrote:

*John Bunyan, while he had a surpassing genius, would not condescend to cull his language from the garden of flowers; but he went into the hayfield and the meadow, plucked up his language by the roots, and spoke out in the words that the people used in their cottages.*

Language matters, and the words of any sermon have to be "rooted" in the personal experiences of the hearers. As a Church member suggested to me many years ago – paraphrasing Spurgeon, perhaps – "not the language of 'upstairs' in the drawing room, but 'below stairs' in the kitchen and laundry." If the fine words of the most eloquent of preachers don't fall usefully on the ears of the hearer, are they really worth offering at all?

Sincerity and passion, used by a preacher who has "plucked up language by the roots" ... seems like a good approach to my next sermon, to give people some "truth to build on", whether it's to be read or not!

### A prayer for today

*Lord, you give me the passion I need. Now help me find the right words to use. Amen*

*An original reflection @ Tom Gordon*

*Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>*