DRESS WITH INTENTION

Preachers everywhere are deciding to robe or not when preaching from their living rooms. Consider this choice before you preach. You may choose to wear only the collar, or wear street clothes rather than an alb or robe and stole to better be in concert with your preaching environment. Or you may choose to robe with intention to visually create sacred associations.

- Solid, bright, and jewel tones look best on camera and frame your face.
- Avoid wearing fabrics with small or distracting patterns that may draw attention away from what you are saying or create a distracting shimmer on camera.

TO STAND OR SIT?

Sitting to preach may not feel natural to some, but it is still proclamation. Now is the time to explore all the ways proclamation can bring Good News. Try standing and preaching to your laptop on top of a high dresser. You may find you speak with greater energy and intensity while standing. Or you may find relaxed posture in an armchair sends a message of hospitality and welcome. Experiment with using the spaces you have, inside and out, to use creative and engaging worship space wherever you are.

CAMERA ANGLES

Some camera angles can exaggerate your facial features and distort your appearance. Whether you are using a USB webcam or the built-in webcam on your laptop, make sure that the camera lens sits at or above eye level, no higher than your hairline. Use all those commentaries you don't need to raise your laptop or invest in a laptop stand.

Once your webcam is in place, find a comfortable distance from the camera where your facial expressions are easily read but you aren't too close for comfort. Position your webcam far enough away to capture your shoulders and your entire face with some room to spare.

- In a recent Zogby Analytics survey, 15% of respondents were most turned off by someone sitting too close to the camera on a video call (hearing people eat was only slightly less off-putting).
- https://www.amazon.com/Pyle-Portable-Adjustable-LaptopStand/dp/B004HJ1ZB8/ref=sr_1_10?dchild=1&keywords=laptop+stand&qid=1588967646&sr=8-10

KEEP IT SIMPLE, NOT BARE

Be cognizant of what's behind you. Your congregation will notice everything and it can distract or enhance your sermon. Try to keep the background simple by avoiding anything that looks busy or cluttered.

- Speaking in front of an entirely blank wall certainly limits distractions, but has the feel of a hostage negotiation video. We are experiencing a rare chance to offer a glimpse into one another's lives. There is something intimate and human about preaching from home. Plan your background accordingly.
- Consider adding a few simple items to define the sacred space. A candle, a cross, a piece of art can add to the experienced sermon.

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

Videoconferencing makes nonverbal communication, facial expression, and eye contact more important than ever. It is much more difficult to attend to a remote speaker and grasp subtleties of meaning. Lighting matters more than you think. All cameras capture better-looking video when there is a good light source, and webcams are no exception.
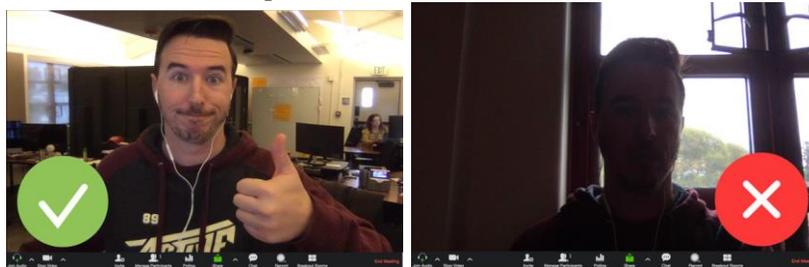
- Avoid Backlight: When selecting a place to record, avoid locations with low light or too much backlighting. Windows make terrible backdrops. No one wants a preacher who appears to be in the witness protection program.
- Avoid too much direct light that washes out your features.
- Light from above: Angle your lighting source to mimic natural sunlight: Light coming toward your face from about 45 degrees angle above you is the most flattering. Lighting from below tends to shadow the angles of the face reminiscent of a scary campfire story.
- Use natural or full spectrum light, avoid fluorescent lighting. Ideally, you want to light yourself from the front with soft, indirect light, and minimize other lighting in the room, particularly from windows or light sources behind you. Place a light with a lampshade in front of you and behind your webcam for even lighting.
- Pro tip: To add extra light, open a word document or other bright page on your screen for extra brightness on your face.
- Any ordinary soft light is sufficient, as long as it is indirect and full spectrum, or you could invest in a ring light or something similar. See addendum for resource links.

ESTABLISH EYE CONTACT WITH THE "CONGREGATION"

Use your imagination to picture your congregation, not a vast, faceless horde, but actual individuals. Speak to them, THROUGH the camera. Unbroken, sustained eye contact with the camera, just as in real life, is unrealistic and can be off-putting. Remember we are hearing you preach communally, not in a one on one conversation. Imagine your congregation in the room with you, behind the camera. See actual faces in your mind's eye, and talk to them.

USE OF NOTES/MANUSCRIPT

Just as when preaching from a pulpit, eye contact matters. Be familiar enough with your sermon that you may deliver without reading. Consider taping your notes at eye level to better remain connected with your congregation. If using notes, consider arranging post-it notes with your main points in a "peacock" pattern around your webcam. Use a music stand just behind the camera to allow the illusion of sustained quality eye contact. Or you may want to consider using a teleprompter positioned just near your camera.

- Teleprompter resource application: nPrompt

GOOD QUALITY AUDIO

Sound matters more than you might think — people can watch an instructional recording with good audio and poor video and still understand what was being shared, but a similar recording with great video and poor audio won't be possible to comprehend. If you intend to use the standard microphone that comes in most laptops or that may be built into your webcam, be sure to create a test recording to check quality. Use a USB microphone to better minimize background noise.

- If you are preaching in an empty church, be aware you will have a hollow, echoing sound. You will achieve a better sound quality by muffling the echo, baffles are available for purchase, or you could fill the space with quilts.
- Minimize other sounds in the room. Turn off your printer, phones, email notifications and any machines or fans that may create excess white noise.

EXPERIMENT, RECORD, REVIEW, AND REVISE

Think outside the desk chair. Feel free to experiment with different styles, locations, backdrops.   You might find re-arranging a room gives you a better recording or better visual coherence. When recording in a new location, or with new equipment, it's always a good idea to record a test video or two. And don't get caught up with self-criticism, perfectionism, and self-doubt. You are called by the God who both created and transcends space and time to send out the all-powerful Word. Remember, your people are more interested in connecting with your pastoral presence more than hearing a perfect sermon. Only YOU can speak a personal word to your particular people in such a time as this.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Software/Web Services

- For simple, cost effective screen recording for the Mac: Quicktime:
  https://support.apple.com/guide/quicktime-player/record-your-screen-qtp97b08e666/mac
- For streaming: Ecamm Live https://www.ecamm.com/mac/ecammlive/
- For streaming to multiple locations: Restream https://restream.io/
- For streaming to Facebook: https://be.live/
- A great resource has been the Ecamm Live Community Facebook group.
  https://www.facebook.com/groups/ecammlive/
- Alternatives for streaming: OBS https://obsproject.com/
- Alternative platform for streaming: Church.Online https://churchonlineplatform.com/
- For graphic overlays: Sketch https://www.sketch.com/
- For free stock images: Unsplash https://unsplash.com/
- For high end equipment and production: Wirecast by Telestream
  https://www.telestream.net/wirecast/

Hardware

- Lighting:
  - Lume Cube https://lumecube.com/
  - Clip on Reading light:
    https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07NKRPZXN/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o02_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=
- Audio:
  - Blue Snowball: https://www.amazon.com/Blue-Snowball-Condenser-Microphone-Cardioid/dp/B014PYGTUQ/ref=sr_1_2?crid=1L1EV8ST2UHYW&dchild=1&keywords=blue+microphone&qid=1588968404&sprefix=blue+mic%2Caps%2C144&sr=8-2
  - USB Microphone: Blue Yeti Nano https://www.amazon.com/Blue-Yeti-Premium-Recording-Streaming/dp/B07DTTGZ7M
  - USB Audio Interface (to plug in your sound equipment into your computer): Focusrite Scarlett 8i6 https://www.sweetwater.com/store/detail/Scarlet8i6G3--focusrite-scarlett-8i6-3rd-gen-usb-audio-interface

Guide to Budget for creating a home studio: Carey Nieuwhof's Home Studio Gear Guide:
https://careynieuwhof.com/the-home-studio-gear-guide-heres-all-the-equipment-you-need-on-a-tiny-budget/