Who is listening

By Kenneth H. Carter Jr.

April 18, 2011

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Regardless of its size, an Easter congregation can be an amazingly diverse audience. Consider the following as a thought experiment about those who will be listening.

- **The grieving.** There may be a widow mourning the loss of her husband, or a widower with his two adult children from out of town. For the grieving, the experience of life and death is like a fresh wound, and the good news must be announced with confidence, sensitivity and realism. This may include acknowledging the grief of the first Easter morning (Mary's weeping in John's Gospel).

- **The estranged.** Families go through illness, divorce and relocation. Churches are often more intentional in their mission to "traditional" families than to those who do not fit this image. But on Easter, everyone shows up--families of four, divorced people, single parents, teenagers who come along with friends. The estranged are often at church on Easter, perhaps because the day reminds them of family times shared in the past, times when that which is now broken was whole. Or maybe it's because they want to hear the good news of Easter--words of hope, healing and new beginnings. They may be cynical and scarred, but they are present.

- **The distracted.** Some of those gathered will be distracted: by the presence of active children, by the feel of new clothing, by anticipation of family plans for the day. Don't worry about these people. Again, they are present. Trust that God will somehow penetrate the distracted thoughts of those who are gathered. A seed may be planted. Allow God to take responsibility for the growth.

- **The seekers.** There may be people present who know very little about the Christian faith. They are not familiar with the meaning of the garden, the cross or the empty tomb, and so the sermon will need to provide some explanation. Why did Jesus die? What happened on the first Easter morning? Who were the participants? How did the experience change their lives? Why does it matter to us? The Easter message communicates truth, but it also opens up question upon question. As you move through these, you will find yourself speaking to seekers but also to many who've spent their entire lives in congregations.

- **The home folks.** And yes, you will be sharing worship with friends who gather faithfully Sunday after Sunday. They know the Easter story, they can follow the order of worship in their sleep, and they know the ushers and greeters by name. The home folks need to hear the gospel in a fresh way for their own spiritual lives, and they also need to consider how God might be giving them a mission to the grieving, the estranged, the distracted and the seeker. Greet the home folks as old friends, and encourage them in their outreach to others.

The service needs to connect with all of these people. That doesn't necessarily mean a sermon that tries to be many things at once. It does mean questioning our assumptions and being aware of the struggles, desires and questions that the various worshipers are bringing to the service.