

The Art of Preaching

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Who's in the Pulpit with You?

"It is a life-draining deception to ever believe that one preaches alone. Of course, one voice speaks in the preaching, yet at every moment, at any given moment when a preacher speaks, many preachers past and present are speaking. The preacher is always a company of preachers."
— Willie James Jennings

One preacher who has shaped my preaching is:

One sermon that has stuck with me is:

When I think about preaching, one challenge or fear I have is:

What is Preaching?

"Introduction to Poetry" by Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Preaching Is...

Proclamation

Teaching

Inspiration and Encouragement

Witness

Why does preaching matter?

Begin with the text

A sermon must originate with the text. There are two key ways to select your passage.

Lectionary

Sermon Series

Revised Common Lectionary

Narrative Lectionary

What are some advantages and disadvantages of each?

The Process: From Scripture to Sermon

Every preacher has a different routine for preparing a sermon. My own begins with a long sitting spell with an open Bible on my lap as I read and read and read the text. What I am hunting for is the God in it.” — Barbara Brown Taylor

Conceiving, Bearing, Naming the Word

framework attributed to the Rev. Dr. Jerusha Neal

exegesis means:

I. Conceiving: creatively engaging and spending time with the text

“It is not your job to ignore the text, defend the text—or to solve it like a puzzle. It is your job to witness to it—to walk in relationship with it—to testify to the God who meets you in your wrestling with it. Remember how ‘to let the Bible be good to you.’” — Justo Gonzalez

Guiding Practices for Conceiving

Find words that shimmer.

What questions arise out of the text for you?

How do you feel when you read it?

Act out the story.

Write out the passage by hand.

Dislocate the passage.

Rewrite the passage in your own words.

Create a picture.

Memorize it.

Other ideas?

II. Bearing: the laborious work of the Word becoming incarnate

Bringing the Passage into Conversation with:

1. The broader Biblical narrative

- What's the context?
- What type of literature is it?
- What do you notice with different translations?

2. Your congregation in its context

- What questions are *they* asking?
- What are the pastoral care concerns?
- What's going on in your community?

3. Scholars, theologians, and saints through Biblical commentaries

- Only *after* you've spent quality time with the text
- What connections are made? What questions are nuanced? What ideas are sharpened?
- What commentaries might come from a tradition, voice, or experience beyond your own?

One source that's new to me is:

III. Naming: clarifying the Good News

Three Ways of Naming

1. Jerusha Neal: Wound and Promise

- Wound: Where is the place of sin, human frailty, brokenness, or suffering in the text? In what ways does it expose injustice in their lives?
- Promise: What is God doing to heal the wound? Where do you see God's faithfulness? Where do you see God's grace and God's power at work?

2. Lisa Cressman: The Heart of the Message

- What is the Good News I believe? (Belief Statement)
- Why does it matter that listeners believe this Good News? (Hope Statement)
- What keeps us from believing this Good News? (The Human Condition)
- What does God want us to say 'yes' to? (Invitation to Transformation)
- Bumper Sticker: What's the heart of the message in one sentence that could be used on a bumper sticker?

3. Tom Long: Focus and Function

- Focus Statement: What is this text saying? What is the one-sentence summary of what this passage is saying to my congregation? What do I want them to walk away with?
- Function Statement: So what? How will this Good News function for my hearers? What is God calling them to do as a result? This is where the rubber meets the road. If it helps, complete the sentence, "So, go and..."

Consider your sermon from earlier. What would you describe as your promise, heart, or focus?

Embodying the Word: An Integrated Conversation

Making Connections & Discerning Form

The Key Question: What will best help me proclaim the Good News that God has given me in a way that is authentic to me and to my context?

What to Consider as You're Crafting the Sermon

- Who's in your congregation?
- What's going on in the world?

- What style should the sermon take?
 - prophetic
 - poetic
 - didactic
 - epistolary
 - first-person
- What stories will resonate?
 - the world around you
 - pop culture
 - personal experiences

Do you have a bucket? If so, great! If not, how might you create one? Will you use a tangible box? An app on your phone? A physical notebook? Make your plans now.

Discerning Your Sermon's Form

Manuscript

Outline

No Notes

Dialogical / Conversational

I'm most comfortable with the _____ form, but I'd like to try _____.

Delivering Your Sermon

Tips for Effective Delivery

- Pay attention to your tone
- Make eye contact
- Use facial expressions that (match the content)
- Practice
- Find a mirror
- Seek honest feedback
- Watch other speakers
- Others?

What's one thing I would do differently?

Brent's Top Ten Preaching Tips

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

One thing I'm taking with me is:

One question I still have is:

Resources

Books for Further Study

- *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World* by Otis Moss III (Westminster John Knox Press): Moss reflects on what he calls "Blue Note Preaching"—a homiletic of improvisation, intimacy, and honesty attuned to the realities of Black experience in a "post-soul" age.
- *Delivering the Sermon* by Teresa Fry Brown (Fortress Press): Brown provides guidance for embodying the sermon in an effective and engaging way through the preacher's voice, gestures, and overall animation in the act of proclamation.
- *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope* by Luke A. Powery (Fortress Press): Powery examines the "death-dealing realities of our world" and demonstrates how to preach in

ways that proclaim God's hope in the face of death, drawing on a variety of sources including Scripture, African American spirituals, and his own experiences.

- *The Four Pages of the Sermon* by Paul Scott Wilson (Abingdon Press): Wilson presents a way of ordering homiletical thought and theological exploration around four "pages"—trouble in the Bible, trouble in our world, grace in the Bible, and grace in our world.
- *From Pew to Pulpit* by Clifton F. Guthrie (Abingdon Press): Guthrie, a seasoned preacher and homiletics professor, offers sage wisdom and practical habits for those beginning a preaching ministry, helping them move from being a listener in the pew to a proclaimer in the pulpit.
- *The Overshadowed Preacher* by Jerusha Neal (Eerdmans): Neal argues that Mary's conceiving, bearing, and naming of Jesus in Luke's nativity is a potent description of the mystery of Christ's presence in preaching, calling preachers to be "overshadowed" by the Spirit.
- *Preaching in the Purple Zone* by Leah Schade (Rowman & Littlefield): Schade provides a guide for navigating the red-blue divide in America, equipping preachers to address controversial social issues from the pulpit in ways that bring people together rather than tear them apart.
- *The Preaching Life* by Barbara Brown Taylor (Cowley Publications): In this theological memoir, Taylor reflects on the joys and challenges of the preaching vocation, exploring how preachers can bear faithful witness to God's presence in the midst of life's ambiguities.
- *Preaching as Testimony* by Anna Carter Florence (Westminster John Knox Press): Florence argues that testimony—bearing witness to what has been seen, heard, and experienced—is the heart of preaching. She explores this theme by examining the lives and works of three 19th-century female preachers who embodied this understanding of proclamation.
- *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World—and Our Preaching—Is Changing* by David J. Lose (Fortress Press): Lose analyzes major cultural shifts of the past century, such as postmodernism, secularism, and pluralism, and proposes ways preachers can engage these realities to proclaim the gospel with relevance and power in the 21st-century context.
- *The Witness of Preaching* by Thomas G. Long (Westminster John Knox Press): Long argues that the preacher's task is to be a faithful witness to the gospel, and he explores the theological, biblical, and pastoral dimensions of the preaching ministry.

Podcasts to Engage with Scripture

- *Sermon Brainwave* — a weekly conversation featuring professors from Luther Seminary discussing upcoming Revised Common Lectionary readings to aid in sermon preparation and worship planning

- *The Bible for Normal People* — offers a deep dive into biblical scholarship and theology, challenging traditional views and encouraging listeners to explore the Bible with curiosity, playfulness, and accessibility
- *The Bible Project* — features detailed conversations on key biblical themes, characters, and stories, aiming to help listeners experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus through approachable and transformative discussions
- *Faith Adjacent* — hosted by Knox McCoy, Jamie Golden, and Erin Moon, explores the modern dynamics of faith with a commitment to uncomfortable honesty, authentic weirdness, and critical thinking, often using pop culture references to enhance biblical literacy

Websites for Reference

- BibleGateway.com — offers more than forty different English translations, including the CEB, NRSVUE, NIV, and The Message
- BlueLetterBible.org — offers resources for Bible study and devotion, but is particularly helpful for its concordance features
- MinistryMatters.com — features articles, commentaries, and lectionary resources
- TextWeek.com — a comprehensive resource for lectionary-based scripture study and worship planning, offering links to a wide array of commentaries, sermons, and liturgical materials indexed by scripture text and liturgical calendar
- WorkingPreacher.org — sponsored by Luther Seminary, features commentaries and sermon starters for both the Revised Common Lectionary and the Narrative Lectionary, as well as a podcast discussing the texts for the week

Commentaries

- _____ *for Everyone* Series by John Goldingjay and N.T. Wright: Published by Westminster John Knox Press, this series features Goldingjay and Wright's accessible and engaging commentaries on the Old and New Testaments, combining their own translations with insightful discussions and applications
- *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*: Published by Westminster John Knox Press, this series offers a fresh and invigorating approach to all the books of the Bible. Building on a wide range of sources, noted scholars provide a theologically focused commentary that considers the contemporary relevance of the texts.
- *Feasting on the Word*: Published by Westminster John Knox Press, this series provides a comprehensive resource for preaching and teaching, with contributions from a wide range of scholars and pastors, offering multiple perspectives on each biblical passage.

- *Interpretation*: Published by Westminster John Knox Press, this series is designed for teaching and preaching, featuring contributions from leading biblical scholars who provide theological and practical insights into the biblical text.
- *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*: Published by Abingdon Press, this twelve-volume set offers critically sound biblical interpretations by scholars, pastors, and laity from diverse traditions, aimed at preachers, teachers, and students of the Bible