My Call to Theological Education

My initial call to ministry came from an encounter with the Greek New Testament. As a college sophomore relatively new to faith, I was at the home of our church’s summer intern who in preparation for a Bible study was looking over his notes and a small book with an odd maroon cover. I asked what the book was and he handed me a copy of the Greek text. I was awestruck! After a few speechless moments, I asked a question that would become my calling: “Do you think God would let me learn Greek?” The next day I purchased a Greek grammar and a copy of Bruce Metzger’s *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*. I was on my way to a life of study.

My fascination with preaching began when I came to faith and began attending church. As an education major, I was fascinated by the pedagogy behind the preaching task. Even before I attended seminary, I was reading some of the classics in homiletical literature. Not surprisingly, I enrolled in homiletics first thing. But almost immediately in that introductory preaching course I became fascinated with the role of the professor who had the pedagogical task of helping ministers think about the pedagogical task of preaching. Now I was hooked not just on preaching but the discipline of homiletics.

On the night before the last class session, I shared with my wife that I thought God might be calling me to teach preaching and thus pursue a PhD. The next day the professor asked me if I had ever considered doing doctoral work. He also invited me to become his research assistant, a rarity since I was only a first-year MDiv student. I spent the Christmas break working on a syllabus for how I would teach preaching if ever given the opportunity. As one might expect, that draft syllabus was incredibly naïve and it never saw the light of day, but the process of working on it was exhilarating. Thankfully, upon completion of my doctoral work, I was given that opportunity and I have spent the greater part of my ministry teaching students to preach.

My love for liturgics came later, when my dean invited me to expand my teaching responsibilities. As faculty members know full well, those kinds of experiences can be good or bad. Fortunately, this was one of the former. Teaching worship is a life-giving privilege for me.

I served two pastorates in my ministry, along with a host of interim pastoral positions as a seminary professor. For the last ten plus years I have been a supply preacher to churches in our area, mostly Disciples congregations in the region where I serve but other traditions as well. My primary calling has been and remains in the seminary, what Fred Craddock likes to call “the education wing of the church.” But when one’s areas are preaching and worship, the sanctuary is also of paramount importance. I consider it one of God’s good gifts in my life to teach preaching and worship, and to serve churches in that way.
Philosophy of Teaching

Since teaching homiletics is an incredibly complicated undertaking, like many teachers of preaching I have tinkered with different approaches over the years while maintaining several constants. The constants that inform my teaching of preaching are as follows:

- **Preaching is both a theological and rhetorical act, in that order.**
  I am fond of telling students that the introductory preaching course is built on three words, “what and how.” In other words, preaching is both a theological and rhetorical endeavor. But before ministers learn the importance of sermon structure or passionate embodiment, preachers must have something to say. Thus, the course begins by examining both a theology of preaching and the theology conveyed in our preaching.

- **Preaching courses are not so much about teaching students how to preach as helping them to become their own homileticians.**
  I remind students the first day of class how much they already know about preaching, either from their own personal experience or from observation even if they have never preached. I stress that while I will teach them certain techniques, the ultimate goal is for them to learn to think homiletically since they will be their own coaches in their ministry settings.

- **Preachers need to find their own homiletical voices.**
  Students learning to preach need to be exposed to a variety of styles and sermon structures, in part so that they see the many options available but also so they might find the styles that fit them best. This variety applies not only to how gender, race, and social location affect preachers but an individual’s personality and spirituality.

- **Preaching courses should be integrated into the larger MDiv curriculum.**
  Because the curriculum requires a certain amount of biblical, theological, and historical courses prior to taking homiletics, preaching courses must show students how those disciplines, as well as others, relate to preaching. The scholarly rigor required in these so-called classical disciplines must also be applied to the preaching task.

- **Preaching courses should be integrated into the local ministry setting.**
  Because so many students are already serving as parish ministers, preaching courses must always be practical. While there are many theological and theoretical “rabbits” worth chasing, I always try to remember that students need help of a
practical nature. Likewise, formal exegetical papers often required in biblical studies courses are not always feasible in a ministry setting. Students need to learn how to honor both the scholarly work required as well as spend realistic amounts of time in sermon preparation.

- **Preaching courses should treat students with respect.**

Since one of the criteria by which students' sermons are critiqued is treating their listeners with respect, the homiletics classroom should do the same for the preacher, especially novice ones. As such, the critique time should be honest and critical while respecting tender feelings. I strive to make positive suggestions as to how the sermon might be improved, even while affirming whatever strengths were present. There are far too many horror stories of ministers who instead of being formed in a preaching class found themselves wounded by the process.

**Present Ministry Positions**

William K. McElvaney Professor of Preaching and Worship  
Saint Paul School of Theology  
August 2007 to present

Regional Minister of Preaching  
Greater Kansas City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
May 2000 to present

**Previous Ministry Positions**

**Teaching—**

Professor of Homiletics and Worship  
Central Baptist Theological Seminary  
August 1995 to May 2007

Adjunct Professor of Preaching  
Spurgeon’s College, London, England  
February 2001 to 2007

Assistant Professor of Preaching  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
August 1989 to July 1995

**Interim Pastorates—**

Parkville Presbyterian Church (PC/USA)  
Parkville, Missouri, August 2013 to January 2014

Hillside Christian Church (DOC)  
Kansas City, Missouri, January 2007 to September 2007
Curriculum Vitae

Mike Graves

Rolling Hills Baptist Church (CBF)
Fayetteville, Arkansas, August 1998 to July 1999

First Baptist Church (ABC)
Kansas City, Missouri, January 1998 to July 1998

First Baptist Church (ABC)
Columbia, Missouri, February 1997 to November 1997

Ashworth Road Baptist Church (CBF)
W. Des Moines, Iowa, December 1994 to October 1995

First Baptist Church
Lathrop, Missouri, June 1993 to June 1994

Pastoral Ministry—
Tryst Falls Baptist Church (CBF), Senior Minister
Kearney, Missouri, June 1991 to June 1993

Lone Camp Baptist Church, Solo Pastorate
Lone Camp, Texas, August 1987 to August 1989

Associate Pastoral Ministry—
First Baptist Church, Youth Minister
Seabrook, Texas, October 1979 to May 1981

First Baptist Church, Ministerial Intern
Pasadena, Texas, January 1979 to October 1979

Education

Ph.D. in Preaching, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Dissertation: "A Study of Kenneth Burke’s Model of Persuasion by
Identification and the Concept of Indirect Communication and Their
Implications for Sermon Structure"

M.Div., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Graduated May

Credentials and Memberships

Ordination recognized by Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), May 1999

Ordained by Lone Camp Baptist Church, February 1988

Member, Academy of Homiletics

Member, Society of Biblical Literature

Advisory Board Member, Day1 Preaching Ministry

Selected Lectures, Addresses, & Workshops

Wells Sermons, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, February 2012

Conference Preacher, Omaha Seminary Foundation, Hastings, NE, June 2010

Chungyup Symposium Lectures, Methodist Theological University, Seoul, S. Korea, November 2008

Ministries Council Retreat, Church of Scotland, Dundee, Scotland, February 2008

Warrack Lectures, Church of Scotland, Saint Andrews University, August 2005

Continuing Education Workshop, Princeton Theological Seminary, March 2005

Fellow, College of Preachers, Washington National Cathedral, Fall 2004

Summer Institute of Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, June 2004

Institute for Continuing Ministry Studies, Claremont, California, July 2003

“Emerson’s Three Things,” Baccalaureate address, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri, May 2003

“One More Thing,” Baccalaureate address, Chapman University, Orange, California, May 2001

**Selected Courses Taught**

**Saint Paul School of Theology**
- Introduction to Preaching
- Introduction to Worship and Liturgy
- The Sermon and the Short Story
- Preaching the Parables of Jesus
- Preaching the Literary Forms of the New Testament
- Preaching to Postmoderns
- Co-leader of DMin track, Revitalizing Congregations

**Spurgeon’s College**
- Narrative Preaching (DMin seminar)

**Central Baptist Theological Seminary**
- Introduction to Homiletics
- The Practice of Preaching
- The Worshiping Church
- Contemporary Homiletical Thought
- Preaching the Gospel of Matthew
- Preaching and Literature

**Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary**
- Principles of Preaching
- Preaching Lab
- Twentieth Century Preaching
- Preaching from the Old Testament
- Preaching from the New Testament
- Innovative Approaches to Preaching
- Worship and Preaching (DMin seminar)

**Publications**

**Books**

*How to Read the Bible like a Seminary Professor* (co-authored work with David May, in progress).

*The Story of Narrative Preaching: Experience and Exposition* (Cascade, forthcoming).


Selected Articles


“The Narrative Preacher as Filmmaker,” Minister Magazine (Fall 2010).

“A Season of Pentecost?” Call to Worship 43 (Fall 2010), 42-44.


“Three Good Preaching Words: Beauty and Justice,” Call to Worship 42 (February 2009), 37-43.


Homiletical articles, Mark 1:2-28; Mark 1:29-39; and Mark 1:40-45 for Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year


“Caring for the Dying: Proclamation Resources,” for Compassion Sabbath, an interfaith project on death and dying sponsored by Midwest Bioethics, Kansas City, 1999.


Selected Published Sermons
“A Different Kind of Dream,” Mark 9:2-10, Day1 Archives online at http://day1.org/3551-a_different_kind_of_dream


Selected Book Reviews


Hearing the Sermon, by Ronald J. Allen; and What Do They Hear? Bridging the Gap between Pulpit and Pew, Mark Allan Powell for Review and Expositor 105 (Summer 2008):531-33.


References

Rev. Carla Aday, Senior Associate Minister, Country Club Christian Church, Kansas City, Missouri 816.333.4917

Dr. James M. Brandt, Professor of Historical Theology and Director of Contextual Education, Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, Missouri 913.253.5018

Dr. Fred B. Craddock, Bandy Professor of Preaching and New Testament, emeritus, Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, Georgia 706.632.5253

Dr. Anna Carter Florence, Peter Marshall Associate Professor of Preaching, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia 404.687.4541

Dr. Eugene L. Lowry, McElvaney Professor of Preaching, emeritus, Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, Missouri 816.333.4506

Dr. David M. May, Professor of New Testament, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Kansas 913.667.5719

Dr. Alyce McKenzie, Le Van Professor of Preaching and Worship, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas 214.768.2111

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