

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

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
Graduated December 1988. Minor emphasis in New Testament.
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
1984. Emphases in Preaching and New Testament.

B.S. in Education, University of Houston. Graduated May 1981.

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

“The New Homiletic,” Four-part lecture, Spurgeon’s College,
London, England, November 1999

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).

What’s the Shape of Narrative Preaching? Essays in Honor of Eugene L. Lowry, (contributor and co-editor with David Schlafer) Chalice Press, 2008.

Preaching Matthew, (co-author with David May) Chalice Press, 2007.

The Fully Alive Preacher: Recovering from Homiletical Burnout, Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

What's the Matter with Preaching Today? (editor and contributor) Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Craddock Stories (co-editor with Richard F. Ward) Chalice Press, 2001.

The Sermon as Symphony: Preaching the Literary Forms of the New Testament, Judson Press, 1997.

Selected Articles

"The Trouble with Idol Meat: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, *Review and Expositor* 110 (Fall 2013):643-52.

"WWLD? The Composition of Luke-Acts as Paradigm for Prophetic Preaching in the Pastorate," *Review and Expositor* 109 (Summer 2012):397-412.

"Four Stewardship Preaching Strategies," *Giving: Growing Joyful Stewards in Your Congregation* 14 (2012), 4-7.

Homiletical articles on Philippians 1:21-30 and 2:1-13 for *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year A, Volume 4, ed. by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 87-91; 111-15.

"The Narrative Preacher as Filmmaker," *Minister Magazine* (Fall 2010).

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

Homiletical articles on 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Heb. 10:16-25; and 1 Pet. 4:1-8 for *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year C, Volume 2, ed. by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 268-73; 292-97; 318-23.

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

"Deeply Dialogical: Rethinking the Conversation Called Preaching," *Journal for Preachers* 32 (Lent 2009), 24-31.

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

B, Volume 1, ed. by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 308-13; 332-37; 356-61.

"Rhetorical Criticism" and "Comparison," for *New Interpreter's Handbook on Preaching*, ed. by Paul Scott Wilson, Abingdon Press, 2008.

"Lessons Learned from My Dentist: Continuing Education for Preachers," *The Clergy Journal* (February 2008), 12-14.

"Preaching and Plagiarizing," *The Clergy Journal* (September 2004), 18-19.

"The Grammar of Preaching," *The Living Pulpit* (January-March, 2003):42-43.

"Holy Saturday: Preaching between Lament and Praise," *The Living Pulpit* (October-December, 2002):31, 40-41.

"Preaching from the Thessalonian Letters," *Review and Expositor* 96 (Spring 1999):233-47.

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

"High Church, Low Church: Which Way Is Worship Going?" *Central Thoughts: Ministry in the 21st Century*, ed. Thomas Clifton (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 1998).

"Preaching Lukan Parables: A Socio-Rhetorical Approach," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 40 (Fall 1997):17-32.

"Luke 10:25-37: The Moral of the 'Good Samaritan' Story?" *Review and Expositor* 94 (Spring 1997):269-75.

"Video Ergo Sum: Preaching and the Electronic Age," *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* (Winter/Spring 1996):17-28.

"The Shapes of Sermons to Come," *Preaching*, March-April, 1994.

"The Trouble with Jet Stream Preaching," *Preaching*, September-October, 1990.

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

"On Having a Word from God," John 1:1-18, *Journal for Preachers*, 27 Advent, 2003, 8-11.

"Followed by the Sun," Matthew 14:22-33, sermon and interview for *Walter Scott Society*, February, 2001.

"The Daughter's Music," Zephaniah 3:14-18a, *Pulpit Digest*, July/August, 1998, 20-24.

"Characters in Search of a Plot," John 2:23-3:21, for the Alfred P. Klauser Sermon Awards, *The Christian Ministry*, September/October, 1997, 21-23.

"Church Is a Nine-Letter Word," Joshua 7:16-26; Acts 5:1-11, *Pulpit Digest*, May/June, 1996, 26-30.

"Second Stanza," Psalm 8, *Best Sermons 6*, ed. by James W. Cox (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1993), 36-40.

Selected Book Reviews

The Renewed Homiletic, ed. by O. Wesley Allen, Jr. for *Review and Expositor* 109 (Winter 2012):139-40.

Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire, by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker for *Journal for Preachers* (Easter 2010):51-53.

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.

Discovering a Sermon: Personal Pastoral Preaching, by Robert C. Dykstra for *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23 (2002):358-60.

Preaching Mark, by Robert Stephen Reid for *Encounter* 61 (Spring 2000):271-72.

Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology, by Charles L. Campbell for *The Christian Ministry*, September-October, 1999, 44-45.

References

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

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

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