



Women and Preaching Book Sampler

LEONORA TUBBS
TISDALE

HOW
WOMEN
TRANSFORM
PREACHING

The cover features a dark background with a white silhouette of a woman's profile in profile, facing right. The title is written in a white, hand-drawn, sans-serif font.

KAROLINE M. LEWIS

EMBODY

The cover has a vibrant purple background. A large, stylized fingerprint graphic is centered, with the word 'EMBODY' written in white, bold, sans-serif letters across it. Below the graphic, the subtitle 'FIVE KEYS TO LEADING WITH INTEGRITY' is written in white, all-caps, sans-serif font.

FIVE KEYS TO
LEADING WITH INTEGRITY

Lisa L. Thompson

ingenuity

The cover features a close-up portrait of a woman with dark, curly hair, looking directly at the camera. The background is a mix of dark and light tones, suggesting a textured or layered effect. The title 'ingenuity' is written in a white, lowercase, serif font.

Preaching as an Outsider

"A POWERFUL REMINDER TO KEEP FIGHTING AND KEEP FAITH."
HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON—FORMER U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE

SACRED
RESISTANCE

The cover features a vibrant, multi-colored background with a rainbow-like gradient from green to orange. At the bottom, there is a white silhouette of a crowd of people with their hands raised. The title 'SACRED RESISTANCE' is written in large, bold, white, sans-serif letters.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND DISSENT

GINGER
GAINES-CIRELLI

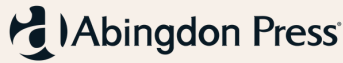
Gerald C. Liu & Khalia J. Williams

Foreword by Lauren Winner

A
WORSHIP
WORKBOOK

The cover features a colorful, abstract illustration of a landscape with trees and a body of water. The colors are vibrant and varied, including blues, yellows, oranges, and greens. The title 'A WORSHIP WORKBOOK' is written in large, white, serif letters.

A Practical Guide for Extraordinary Liturgy



Women and Preaching Book Sampler

The Women and Preaching book sampler shares the first chapter of five books by women preachers and authors.

Abingdon Press offers new resources that challenge pastors, church leaders, and general readers to faithful scholarship, transformative practices, and social responsibility.

We hope this sampler will inspire your preaching.

How Women Transform Preaching

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Embody: Five Keys to Leading with Integrity

Karoline M. Lewis

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Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider

Lisa L. Thompson

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Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide to Christian Witness and Dissent

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A Worship Workbook: A Practical Guide for Extraordinary Liturgy

Khalia J. Williams and Gerald C. Liu

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LEONORA TUBBS
TISDALE



HOW
WOMEN
TRANSFORM
PREACHING

How Women Transform Preaching

Other Books by Leonora Tubbs Tisdale

A Sermon Workbook: Exercises in the Art and Craft of Preaching,
co-author with Thomas H. Troeger (Abingdon Press, 2013)

The Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual, Series 2 Year A
(Abingdon Press, 2001)

The Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual, Series 2 Year C
(Abingdon Press, 2000)

The Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual, Series 2 Year B
(Abingdon Press, 1999)

The Sun Still Rises: Meditations on Faith at Midlife
(Westminster John Knox Press, 2017)

Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship,
co-editor with Brian K. Blount (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001)

How Women Transform Preaching

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale

 Abingdon Press™

HOW WOMEN TRANSFORM PREACHING

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Significant portions of chapter 2 were previously published in *The International Journal of Homiletics* (Vol. 2, Issue 1). Used by permission.

The sixteen homiletical foremothers interviewed for this book have granted their permission to use quotations from their interviews.

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

More Praise for *How Women Transform Preaching*

“Leonora Tubbs Tisdale’s overview of the history of three centuries of women preachers and homiletics scholars in the United States is a treasure. This is a must-read for every pastor and seminarian, every congregational leader, and every confirmand, whatever their gender identification. Tisdale draws back the curtain on a largely invisible history of courage and perseverance on the part of women who could not, and would not, stifle the liberating Word the Spirit had given them to preach. At the same time, she draws us in close to overhear her interviews with one preaching woman after another who testify to costly journeys to the pulpit, leaning into strong headwinds of resistance. This book reminds us that the Spirit will continue to put the life-giving Word of God’s redemptive engagement with the world into the mouths of the officially excluded, until all are included, all set free.”

—Sally A. Brown, Elizabeth M. Engle Professor of Preaching and Worship, director, Engle Institute of Preaching, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

“Preaching and patriarchy have a long and troubling alliance, and Nora Tubbs Tisdale shows us why in this magnificent book. By unearthing women’s stories, struggles, and strategies for facing resistance, Tisdale makes a monumental contribution to the history of preaching. Her insights are a treasure for all who are called to bear witness to heartfelt convictions. This book is incisive, riveting, and inspiring.”

—Donyelle C. McCray, assistant professor of homiletics, Yale Divinity School, Yale University, New Haven, CT

“In your hand is a book only Leonora Tubbs Tisdale could write. In this concise yet remarkably compendious work, hidden figures become visible, muted voices speak, homiletical foremothers tutor, and readers quickly discern that women preachers are not only not going away but have a remarkable and praiseworthy preaching legacy to boast. History, or rather herstory, is recast as narrated wisdom for our times, as Tisdale weaves autobiography and curated testimony from her candid conversations with a racially, ethnically, and denominationally diverse group of women whose individual stories and unheralded service to the church and academy hand to coming generations keys for opening previously padlocked pulpits deemed off limits to preaching women.”

—Kenyatta R. Gilbert, professor of homiletics, Howard University, Washington, DC; author, *Exodus Preaching* (Abingdon Press)

“*How Women Transform Preaching* is an epic homiletical ‘herstory.’ With wisdom and grace, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale narrates the courage and perseverance of women preachers of the past, while inspiring and uplifting women preachers in the present. This is one of those books that will be a must-read for any student of homiletics, all preachers committed to knowing the great cloud of homiletical

witnesses on whose shoulders we stand, and those curious persons of faith who wonder what witnessing to the gospel requires.”

—Karoline M. Lewis, Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN; program director, Festival of Homiletics; author, *SHE: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry* and *Embodiment: Five Keys to Leading with Integrity* (Abingdon Press)

“One of the preeminent voices in homiletics shares one of its preeminent concerns: Tisdale reclaims the herstory, influence, and vitality of women preachers and teachers of homiletics who continue to shape the way we understand God and one another. Read what you’ve missed, be encouraged by their stories, and draw wisdom from the life-giving changes women have made in the church and world.”

—Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship, Bethany Theological Seminary, Richmond, IN; editor, *Homiletic* (The Journal of the Academy of Homiletics)

“Leonora Tubbs Tisdale offers an accessible glimpse into what remains an under-documented and incomplete herstory of preaching in the US. She is beckoning us toward the diversities of preaching for the ongoing transformation of preaching.”

—Lisa L. Thompson, Associate Professor and the Cornelius Vanderbilt Chancellor Faculty Fellow of Black Homiletics and Liturgics, Vanderbilt Divinity School, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

“*How Women Transform Preaching* is a book that had to be written, and no one is better positioned to write it than Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, one of the most gifted homiletical scholars and teachers of our generation. She brings her skills as cultural exegete, biographer, and ethnographic interviewer together in this work that analyzes and celebrates the contributions of women preachers and homiletical scholars past and present. All preachers will recognize how their own preaching is indebted, in ways they may not have realized, to canny, courageous women preachers past and present who have forever transformed the future of preaching.”

—Alyce McKenzie, Le Van Professor of Preaching and Worship; Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor; director, Center for Preaching Excellence; Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX

“Leonora Tubbs Tisdale has produced a picture of women’s preaching that sings, rings true, and jumps off the page. If the title alone doesn’t make your heart rise within you, then flip a few pages. Here you will find exquisite word pictures of what it looks like when women preach, thoughtful analysis of what difference it makes, and story after story of the heartbreaks and victories that accompany the task. Anyone who loves words or women or pulpits or indeed the church itself will love Tisdale’s joyous telling of this important story.”

—Jana Childers, dean, professor of homiletics and speech communication, San Francisco Theological Seminary, University of Redlands, San Anselmo, CA

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Chapter One

Women Preachers in the USA: A Sixty-Year Retrospective

What the Statistics Tell Us

Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair Lummis, and Patricia Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*

Thirty years ago Barbara Brown Zikmund (then President of Hartford Seminary), her colleague in sociology Adair Lummis, and research associate Patricia Chang undertook what was at the time the most extensive survey of clergywomen from predominantly white Protestant denominations ever undertaken. Their research, published in the book *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, summarized the findings from nearly five thousand surveys provided by ordained women and men in fifteen Protestant denominations, including the major “mainline” traditions as well as Southern Baptist, Unitarian-Universalist, and Assemblies of God denominations. These researchers did not include historically black Protestant denominations in their study since they were at the time being surveyed in another study undertaken by Delores Carpenter of Howard University—about which I will say more shortly.

The aims of the research by this team were several-fold:

- to compare statistically the numbers of clergywomen in the mid-1990s with the numbers evidenced in another study undertaken in 1977,
- to explore the ways in which various denominational procedures and practices influenced the experience of clergywomen within them, and
- to assess how successfully denominations and congregations were handling the rising numbers of clergywomen.¹

At the time of their survey, Zikmund and her team found that United Methodists reported the largest number of ordained women overall (around three thousand²), followed by the United Church of Christ (around eighteen hundred) and the Assemblies of God (around sixteen hundred). However, when they looked at the percentages of clergywomen within various denominations they found that the Unitarian-Universalists had the highest percentage of women (30 percent), the UCC the second highest (25 percent), followed by the Disciples of Christ, which had 18 percent. The Southern Baptist Convention, which had formally adopted resolutions against the ordination of women, and the Free Methodist Church had the smallest percentages (fewer than 1 percent). Their study did not include Roman Catholic or Orthodox denominations who were not ordaining women at all.

Their study also showed that clergywomen were significantly underpaid relative to men (earning 9 percent less than their male counterparts in similar jobs), and that women had more difficulty finding jobs than their male counterparts—in part because denominational leadership deployment procedures consistently placed women at a disadvantage. “Clergy

1. Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Loomis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). Much of the research cited in this section is summarized in “*Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, an abstract of the study” written by the authors and found online at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research website, http://hrr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/clergywomen_abstract.html, 2.

2. I have rounded off the statistics to the nearest hundred.

women,” they wrote, “are unwittingly ‘tracked’ onto positions with less occupational status and promise.”³ They also found that women were far more likely than men to become part-time pastors, to opt for employment in specialized ministries such as chaplaincy or nonprofit work, or to leave parish ministry altogether.

These researchers subtitled their book about clergywomen “an uphill calling” because they predicted that women would continue to battle practices and prejudices on the part of their denominations and congregations that would make the way forward a difficult one for them.

Delores C. Carpenter, *A Time for Honor: A Portrait of African American Clergywomen*

In 1999, Delores Carpenter, Associate Professor of Religious Education at Howard University, published her study of clergywomen from historically Black Protestant denominations. Her findings were recorded in her book *A Time for Honor: A Portrait of African American Clergywomen*. If Zikmund’s study showed that white women faced an uphill climb, Carpenter’s study showed that African American clergywomen were trying to scale mountain faces.

The pay gap between clergywomen and clergymen was 15 percent in the higher ranges,⁴ clergywomen’s acceptance in historically Black denominations was problematic (often with female congregants and male senior pastors being the most non-accepting), and their opportunities for serving as pastors of churches or for pastoral advancement were slim (given that congregations preferred younger male clergy as their senior pastors). Only one-fifth (21 percent) of the ordained clergywomen actually found employment as full-time pastors versus one-half (49 percent) of the male clergy.⁵ Given the reality that over half of the clergywomen were single—two-thirds of them being single mothers with children—the challenges they faced providing for themselves and their families were enormous. The

3. Zikmund et al, “*Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, an abstract,” 2–3.

4. Delores C. Carpenter, *A Time for Honor: A Portrait of African American Clergywomen* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 151–52.

5. Carpenter, *A Time for Honor*, 150.

majority said they acquired their primary salaries from secular jobs and worked either for free or for little pay in the church.⁶

These clergywomen also entered seminary later in life than their male counterparts (median age at admission being forty). Forty-five percent said they had switched denominations at some point, with over half of those (24 percent) saying that the desire for ordination was a major issue in doing so.⁷

These statistics give testimony to the ways in which women's experiences of call are complicated by gender formation and delayed awareness of their own gifts and abilities. When women grow up in an environment that discourages them from recognizing their God-given gifts and callings, or that openly forbids them from taking up the mantle of preacher, it takes tremendous courage, perseverance, and time for them to pursue that calling. When you add to the emotional and psychological pressures women endure—the grim realities of trying to provide for their families when jobs are scarce, salaries are poor, and positive support from parishioners is lacking—it is a wonder these women pursued their callings at all.

Eileen Campbell-Reed, "State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.: A Statistical Update October 2018"

The latest study of clergywomen was undertaken in 2018 by Eileen Campbell-Reed, a Baptist clergywoman who describes herself as an "academic entrepreneur." When she realized that no major studies had been made of clergywomen in the past two decades, she and her research assistant sought to correct that oversight by conducting their own study in conversation with a number of denominational staff and the statistics they provided her.⁸ She has published some of her most significant findings in an online article, while she works on a full-length book.

Here are some of the major findings:

6. Carpenter, *A Time for Honor*, 151–54.

7. Carpenter, *A Time for Honor*, 139–40.

8. Eileen Campbell-Reed, "State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.: A Statistical Update October 2018." The report is posted on Campbell-Reed's blogsite at eileencampbellreed.org. She reports that a book project on clergywomen in the US is currently underway.

- In 1960, the US census reported women represented 2.3 percent of all US clergy. In 2016 census reports, women represented 20.7 percent of all professional clergy.⁹
- In a number of the “mainline” denominations, the percentage of clergywomen has doubled or tripled since 1994. For example, numbers have tripled in the Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Assemblies of God.¹⁰ Numbers of clergywomen in the United Methodist, Disciples of Christ, and Church of the Brethren have doubled, while Presbyterians (USA) grew from 19 percent to 29 percent.¹¹ American Baptist numbers have remained relatively unchanged the past twenty years with only 13 percent of the clergy being women.¹² On the other end of the spectrum, Unitarian Universalist and United Church of Christ clergywomen *have actually reached numerical equity with clergymen*.¹³
- In addition, their research showed that numbers were also growing in other Protestant, Pentecostal, and Peace churches. Women currently represent 30 percent of Mennonite clergy, 25 percent of Church of God clergy, and 37 percent of Four-square clergy.¹⁴ The statistics for Southern Baptist women are harder to track since that denomination still denies ordination to women. However, the progressive Alliance of Baptists that broke off from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1987 has women pastoring 40 percent of its congregations (it is a small denomination with only 143 congregations), and women are pastoring 7 percent of congregations in the more moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Notably, however, this study

9. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 2.

10. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 6.

11. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 7.

12. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.”

13. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.” Italics added for emphasis.

14. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.”

claims that “*none of the 47,000 Southern Baptist congregations in the U.S. reportedly have female pastors.*”¹⁵

- While the Roman Catholic Church still denies women’s ordination to the offices of priest and deacon, this study notes that since 2015, lay ministers outnumber priests as designated leaders in parish ministry in the US, and 80 percent of those lay ecclesial ministers are women.¹⁶

Campbell-Reed also notes that “in historically Black denominations, women continue to push up a very steep hill to follow God’s call into professional ministry. For example, in Black Baptist churches women represent 50-75% of church members, but less than 10% of church leadership, and perhaps 1% of pastors.”¹⁷ The African Methodist Episcopal Church offers more hopeful statistics in that a 2017 annual report on women in ministry identified thirty-two hundred women being ordained for pastoral office, and around twelve hundred serving appointments as congregational pastors.¹⁸ Since 2000, the AME Church has also elected four women to the office of Bishop.¹⁹

Campbell-Reed also observed that during the past twenty years one of the biggest changes in church leadership has been the increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ folk as ordained ministers and even, in some cases, as bishops. However, she also says that in many places, “they continue to struggle uphill in their vocations to serve churches that remain ambivalent or outright hostile to them.”²⁰

15. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 7–8. Italics added for emphasis.

16. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 7. These statistics come from CARA, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

17. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 8.

18. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.” While Campbell-Reed does not indicate what percentage of the whole these female pastors constitute, she does cite a 2016 report that estimates that women constituted more than one-fourth of congregational pastors (26 percent) in AME churches.

19. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 8.

20. Campbell-Reed, “State of the Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 9.

Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin, *She Preached the Word: Women's Ordination in Modern America*

Finally, a book on women's ordination in America, published in 2018 by two political scientists, Benjamin Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin, cites several additional statistics worthy of our consideration:

- A 2015 National Congregations Survey showed that while three out of five congregations in the US (around 60 percent) allow women to serve as the head clergy person, only 11 percent of the congregations actually have women serving as the “senior or solo” pastoral leader.²¹ There is a huge gap, then, between what denominations allow and what congregations actually do.
- While Zikmund and Williams found in 1990 that clergywomen made between 9 percent and 15 percent less than clergymen in comparable jobs, a 2016 study found that clergywomen made, on average, only seventy-six cents for every dollar that male clergy made (25 percent less).²² Evidently the pay gap between male and female clergy colleagues is increasing, not decreasing.

When taken together these statistics tell a mixed tale. In some denominations, the numbers of women clergy are rapidly expanding and even reaching numerical parity with clergymen, while in other traditions they are not growing much at all and seem to have stalled.²³ Furthermore,

21. See Mark Chaves and Alison Eagle, “National Congregations Study” (2015), http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf (May 3, 2016), as quoted in Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin, *She Preached the Word: Women's Ordination in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

22. Tobin Grant, “Gender Pay Gap Among Clergy Worse Than National Average—a First Look at the New National Data,” Religion News Service. <https://religionnews.com/2016/01/12/gender-pay-gap-among-clergy-worse-than-national-average-a-first-look-at-the-new-national-data/> (May 3, 2016), as cited in Knoll and Bolin, *She Preached the Word*, 29.

23. A study by Knoll and Bolin, based on census data, claims that overall the percentage of clergywomen in the US has stalled at around 15 percent since the mid-1990s. See *She Preached the Word*, pp. 9–10. This finding, however, is at odds with the findings of Eileen Campbell-Reed regarding the rapid growth of women clergy in some denominations and her claim that women clergy now comprise 20 percent of the US clergy population.

while the numbers overall are growing, it is still the case that women are the senior or solo pastoral leader in only 11 percent of US congregations. And in the two largest church bodies in the US—the Southern Baptist Convention and the Roman Catholic church—it is still not possible for women to be ordained to ministry at all. Clergywomen are still being underpaid compared to their male counterparts. They still have difficulty getting calls as senior pastors in larger parishes, and they tend to spend longer periods of time in rural parishes or as assistant pastors than they do as solo pastors or senior pastors.

These realities are what the statistics reveal to us. But what do the women themselves tell us about becoming a preaching woman in the US during the past sixty years?

The Stories of the Homiletical Foremothers

As indicated in the introduction to this volume, as a part of my research for this book I interviewed sixteen women who not only have been preachers themselves but also, for the most part, have pursued careers in homiletical scholarship and teaching. I wanted to hear from them—in their own voices—how this preaching journey has unfolded for them, where they have faced challenges and triumphs in ministry, and how they perceive the preaching scene for women today. My own interview sample was admittedly narrow—comprised primarily of women who have been trailblazers in the field of homiletics in the US²⁴—so I certainly do not claim that these women speak for clergywomen as a whole. But their responses to the questions I asked all of them do help flesh out and amplify some of the statistics I have cited here—as well as chronicling the often-difficult life experiences that have gone on behind the scenes as these women responded to their own calls to preach. I can well imagine

24. For a complete listing of the homiletical foremothers I interviewed and the questions I asked them, see appendixes A and B.

that many seminarians and clergywomen will find places of identification within their stories.

Hearing a Woman Preach for the First Time

The very first questions I asked all of the women I interviewed were: *When was the first time you heard a woman preach? And what was the effect of that experience on you?* For nearly all the white Protestant clergywomen I interviewed, the answer to the first question was very much akin to my own experience (see the introduction). These women did not hear a woman preach from a pulpit until they were young adults, often after they had entered seminary. Sometimes they couldn't even remember the first woman preacher they heard; they just knew that they had been in churches pastored by men their entire lives until adulthood.

In terms of the effect this experience had on them, Carol Norén, who is ordained in The United Methodist Church and who taught for many years at North Park Theological Seminary in Illinois, recounts that she was twenty-four years old and engaging in a seminary internship in Manchester, England, when she heard Sister Mabel Sykes, a Methodist deaconess, lead the Sunday evening service at one of the two churches she was serving. Norén says, "As she preached, I had the sensation of someone holding up a mirror, that is, 'Oh! *This* is how it looks and sounds when a woman is preaching. I wonder if that's the way I look and sound.'" She adds, "I hadn't given . . . much thought to gender and preaching before that."²⁵

Lucy Lind Hogan, a recently retired professor of preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, and an ordained Episcopal priest, recalls that when she entered seminary in 1976 at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California, women were not allowed to be ordained priests. They were allowed to be ordained deacons, but thus far none had been. "In fact," she says, "I thought 'Why am I doing this? I don't even know why I'm doing this.'" The first women she heard preach were her two classmates in her introduction to preaching class. There were actually four students in the class, Lucy recounts—three

25. Carol Norén (Wesley Nelson Professor of Homiletics, *emerita*, North Park Theological Seminary), interview questions answered in writing by Norén, November 5, 2018.

women and one man and the professor who was a church musician. “We just wrote a sermon every week and preached it to each other. So basically two other women and I taught ourselves to preach.”²⁶

Mary Donovan Turner, who has taught preaching for nearly three decades at Pacific School of Religion, says she has no memories of the first time she heard a woman preach and surmises that it must have been while she was in seminary. All of her pastors growing up in a Disciples of Christ church in Louisiana were men, and she even says that when she last visited that church about ten years ago, it still had an all-male pastoral staff and an all-male group of elders and deacons, marching down the aisle two by two, to serve Communion.

But Turner has very early positive memories of church and being drawn toward its mysteries:

Even as a five-year-old I was enthralled with the mystery of it. There was in the front of that Disciple church the baptistry . . . because we were immersed, and then there are these glass panels on each side of the baptistry. It is a phenomenally beautiful brick church, inside and out. . . . I still dream about it. So on Sunday morning the big organ would start playing and the minister would come through one of those glass panels that doesn't really look like a door. . . . And in my child's mind, there are all these passageways back there. It's mysterious and dark and close to God back there.²⁷

Lutheran pastor and professor Barbara Lundblad, now retired from teaching preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York, doesn't remember the first time she heard a woman preach either. But she does recall the first time she saw a woman preside at the Eucharist. It was in Marquand Chapel at Yale Divinity School in 1976 when Lundblad was a first-year seminary student and was thirty-two years old. Joan Forsberg, who had been ordained by the United Church of Christ in 1954, and who went on to serve as Registrar and then Dean of Students at the Divinity

26. Lucy Lind Hogan (Hugh Latimer Elderdice Professor of Preaching and Worship, *emerita*, Wesley Theological Seminary), Zoom interview by the author, December 12, 2018.

27. Mary Donovan Turner (Carl Patton Professor of Preaching, *emerita*, Pacific School of Religion), Zoom interview by the author, December 10, 2018.

School, mentoring many women students along the way, was the presider at the table.

“She was such an amazing presence,” Lundblad recounts. “What I think I most remember is her presence and the way she reached out to this whole community of people. We were all gathered around the Communion table there, and she did the invitation: ‘Come from the East and the West and the North and the South.’ As she did that, she turned around, and I just felt like, this is the first time I have ever been invited to Communion in my life.”²⁸

Jana Childers, an ordained Presbyterian minister and professor of preaching at University of Redlands/San Francisco Theological Seminary, recalls growing up as a child in a conservative Pentecostal church and surviving church by regularly critiquing the sermons she experienced as being in a “manipulative style.” Her first experience hearing a woman preach came just before she went to seminary. “She had red hair,” said Childers (who has red hair herself). “I was just so struck with the light falling on that hair, and that face, and the fact that I was watching a woman preach. It’s one of those mental snapshots that you carry all the rest of your life. She was lively and she was very sharp. Her points were very focused. I think I remember thinking, ‘I don’t think that I’m that focused, but I sure do like the whole idea of what she is doing.’”²⁹

Christine Smith, author of the first book that addressed preaching from a feminist perspective, recalls that she was in college and on vacation at Nags Head, North Carolina, with her family when she heard that a woman who ran a beach ministry there was going to be preaching the following Sunday morning. Smith herself says that she had had a strong sense of call to ordained ministry since high school but had never before seen a woman do what she wanted to do. She announced to her family that she was going to hear this woman preach. What was it like for her? “I

28. Barbara K. Lundblad (Joe R. Engle Professor of Homiletics, *emerita*, Union Theological Seminary, New York), Zoom interview by the author, November 1, 2018.

29. Jana Childers (Dean, University of Redlands School of Theology/San Francisco Theological Seminary; Professor of Homiletics and Speech Communication), Zoom interview by the author, November 16, 2018.

think I was really overcome with joy,” she said, “and with . . . some sorrow that I was in college and I had never seen a woman preach.”³⁰

For United Methodist Alyce McKenzie, who teaches preaching at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, the first time she heard a woman preach was after she had been ordained and was attending a workshop led by the noted preacher and author Barbara Brown Taylor. “I was in awe,” she said, “and I thought, ‘Why aren’t there more role models around? Where were they? Thank God I have had this experience.’”³¹

The Roman Catholic women I interviewed, both of whom are women religious, had a somewhat different experience than their Protestant counterparts regarding women and preaching.

Sister Joan Delaplane, who was the very first woman to join the Academy of Homiletics (the North American society of teachers of preaching) in 1977, and who celebrated seventy years as a sister in the Dominican Order (Order of Preachers) in 2019, recounts, “It’s a good question (when I first heard a woman preach), and it’s a hard one for me because growing up Catholic and having Catholic (biological) sisters, they really preached, I would say, in a different kind of way. Then I entered a community of all women who just ordinarily would speak, but they were really preaching, but we didn’t call it that. I think I was never taken aback, or stunned, or in awe when I’d hear women preaching because that’s just part of my life, but in a different kind of way. Not necessarily from the pulpit as it were.”³²

Mary Catherine Hilkert, professor of systematic theology at Notre Dame University and a former Lyman Beecher lecturer, is also a Dominican sister who recalls hearing her Dominican sisters preaching through the years. One of the most notable was Kathleen Cannon—now her colleague

30. Christine Marie Smith (Professor of Preaching *emerita* at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities), Zoom interview by the author, February 25, 2019.

31. Alyce M. McKenzie (George W. and Nell Ayers LeVan Professor of Preaching and Worship, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University), Zoom interview by the author, November 16, 2018.

32. Joan Delaplane, O.P. (Adrian Dominican Sister of the Order of Preachers and professor of preaching for twenty-five years at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis), Zoom interview by the author, November 12, 2018.

at Notre Dame—who led a week-long retreat for Hilkert’s congregation in Akron, Ohio, where Hilkert was then serving as a school teacher. “It was a wonderful collaboration between herself and Paul Philbert, O.P., the Dominican friar she was preaching with, that gave me such a sense of the scriptures, and how she lives them, loves them.” Hilkert also recalled hearing a prioress in her community who had spent much of her life in El Salvador and who had known Oscar Romero, preaching powerfully and joyfully out of a strong sense of social justice.³³

Several of the women of color I interviewed also recalled women “preaching”—but not as ordained women and not from the pulpit.

Minerva Carcaño, the first Latina Bishop in The United Methodist Church, says that though she didn’t hear women officially preaching until she was in preaching class in seminary, she had known three women—lay-women—who were local pastors and gave tremendous witness to their faith “around the edges.” She also recalls how her grandmother Sophia and her mother, Rebecca, would preach to her at the table and unpack Scripture for her.

When she first heard her women classmates preach in seminary, she says, “I felt this great resonance with these women, I felt their spirit, I felt the possibility of preaching in my own voice. I found in our brothers in the class very much the model of traditional preaching and I thought, ‘I’m not a man. That doesn’t feel comfortable.’ It didn’t feel like that was a skin I could put on.”³⁴

Teresa Fry Brown, the Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology and the first African American woman tenured on that faculty, says that in her Black Baptist upbringing, though she didn’t hear women doing what was called “preaching,” there were women in her culture who were called “prayer warriors” who would lead testimony services. “They were doing the same thing as men were doing, but they were ‘speakers.’ So I heard speakers from the time I was aware I was in church.” She says that her own Aunt Thelma, her grandmother’s sister, was the

33. Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P. (Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame), Zoom interview by the author, December 5, 2018.

34. Minerva G. Carcaño (Bishop of the California-Nevada Conference of The United Methodist Church), Zoom interview by the author, December 6, 2018.

pastor of a church thirty-five miles from where she grew up but that the family never spoke of it and actually kept that fact a secret from her. She would hear Aunt Thelma speaking at churches, but she also reports that Thelma was never allowed to do so in the pulpit. She always had to do so from the floor.³⁵

Martha Simmons is one of those African American clergywomen De-lores Carpenter talks about who left her National Baptist denomination in the hopes of having more ministry options in the United Church of Christ. Simmons, the creator and director of the *African American Lectionary* and co-editor of the only African American preaching anthology to date, recalls that in her childhood, she never heard women preach from the pulpit but that she did hear women musicians “*sneak-a-preach.*” Simmons says this was a common practice in African American church history:

Women who couldn't use the title Reverend in certain circles, but who were very well liked in those circles, they didn't upset the apple cart; they'd *sneak-a-preach* while they were singing or praying. The most currently well-known preacher to do that is Shirley Caesar. I guess Shirley Caesar had been out there singing and sneaking preaching for thirty, forty years before she took the title Reverend. But I knew that woman was preaching. . . . And every time she sang, she would do it.³⁶

Gennifer Benjamin Brooks, Styberg professor of preaching at Garrett Evangelical Seminary, grew up in Trinidad in the Caribbean. She recounts that the one place she heard women preaching—though they wouldn't have considered themselves doing so—was in the Evangelical Spiritual Baptist (Shouters) church. These women would preach on street corners but not in church sanctuaries. “It seemed to me,” she said, “that what they preached was always very well connected to life. . . . I remember one woman coming down to the street where we lived and standing on the corner and preaching about the world . . . the state of the world. And she

35. Teresa Fry Brown (Bandy Professor of Preaching, Candler School of Theology, Emory University), Zoom interview by the author, December 7, 2018.

36. Martha Simmons (Creator and Director of the *African American Lectionary*), Zoom interview by the author, December 3, 2018.

saw babes with mothers in their arms. You heard what I said? Not mothers with babes in their arms. . . . That image has never left me.”³⁷

For Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, who teaches preaching and liturgics at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, the path to preaching was somewhat different than that of her Christian homiletical colleagues. Wenig grew up in a secular Jewish household. She began to attend synagogue services and study with a rabbi only in high school. Her mother and aunt were pioneering feminists in their fields, so Wenig “just assumed women could do absolutely anything we wanted to. . . . It had not occurred to me that women couldn’t be rabbis.”³⁸ At the time she entered rabbinical school in 1978, there were only three women who had been ordained rabbis in the Reform movement (which began ordaining women in 1972) and one who had been ordained in the Reconstructionist movement.

The woman who was most influential in her preaching formation was Barbara Lundblad. The first congregation where Rabbi Wenig served, Beth Am, The People’s Temple in Washington Heights in New York City, rented space from the Lutheran congregation (Our Saviors Atonement Lutheran Church) where Barbara Lundblad served as pastor. “For all those years,” she recounts, “I not only heard [Barbara] preach. But for a number of those years, Barbara used to leave her Sunday sermon manuscript in the pulpit. And when I arrived for work on Monday, I’d find and read them. . . . Between the feedback that I received on a weekly basis from my congregation, which sat and discussed the sermon with the rabbi every Friday night following services, and Barbara’s example, I began to learn a lot more about preaching than I had learned in rabbinical school.”³⁹

37. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks (Ernest and Bernice Styberg Associate Professor of Preaching and Director of the Styberg Preaching Institute, Garrett Evangelical Seminary), Zoom interview by the author, November 2, 2018.

38. Margaret Moers Wenig (Lecturer on Homiletics and Liturgy, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion), Zoom interview by the author, December 13, 2018.

39. Margaret Moers Wenig interview.

Challenges Faced on Path to Ministry

In my interviews with these women I also asked them about the challenges they faced along the way in their own paths toward ordination.

Alyce McKenzie recounts that the obstacles she encountered were mostly internal, since she was very shy and didn't want to go into a field that required public speaking.⁴⁰

Barbara Lundblad recounts a different internal struggle, pertaining to the whole matter of ordination itself. Before going to seminary Lundblad had worked for a number of years as a youth director in a parish in Minnesota and very much wanted to affirm the ministries of the laity. She felt that becoming ordained might be unfaithful to her affirmation of people in lay ministries and had to be convinced that this was an okay path for her to take. She recalls a panel at Yale Divinity School during her student days that helped clarify that calling for her.⁴¹

Linda Clader, who taught preaching for many years at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, recounts that before she went to seminary, she was teaching Classics at a university and serving as the senior warden in her church and encountered opposition from some of the men on the vestry to having a woman in that position. "I had run into opposition about being a leader more than being an ordained person necessarily," she recounts.⁴²

But once again there is something of a divide between what the white women and women of color recounted about the intensity of opposition in their ordination experiences.

Minerva Carcaño, for example, tells of the opposition she received both from her parents and from her pastor when she indicated that she wanted to go to seminary and become ordained. When her father expressed concerns about his daughter going to seminary to their pastor, the pastor told him, "Pablito, let her go. She will find a good man called by

40. Alyce M. McKenzie interview.

41. Barbara K. Lundblad interview.

42. Linda Clader (Professor of Homiletics *Emerita*, Church Divinity School of the Pacific), Zoom interview by the author, November 5, 2018.

God, marry him, become a good wife to a pastor and all this will be left behind.”⁴³

A year or so later when Carcaño was in seminary at Perkins School of Theology, the Board of Ordained Ministry from her conference in Texas came to meet with the four people from the conference who were studying at Perkins: three men and Carcaño. She recounts that she was the last to be interviewed and that at the end of the interview, the people on the board turned to her pastor—who was sitting at the table with them, since he was the registrar for ministry for the conference—and said, “Why didn’t you tell us?” She realized in that moment that *her pastor had not even put her name on the list of seminarians up for ordination.*⁴⁴

Carcaño tells that later when she was ordained and was appointed by the Bishop to serve a small new church start of thirty people in Lubbock, Texas—a church that had been abandoned by their previous pastor—she arrived in January after a snow storm. She says, “It was tremendously cold and I’m trying to build a relationship with those who were present. And I felt the coldness of their welcome with some exceptions. When I got up to preach, I noticed that they were passing a book, person to person to person to person. In some cases I could see their finger pointing to a particular place in the book and whatever they were being invited to read as I preached. I learned at the end of the worship service that it was a Bible, and they had opened it to that Pauline passage that stated, ‘Women shall not speak in the community of faith.’ *[T]his was my first appointment, this was my first sermon as a pastor of a church in my own right. And that was the reception. And it was [the same] every Sunday for the time I was there.*”⁴⁵

Martha Simmons, who was worshipping at a Black Baptist church in San Francisco at the time she proposed going to seminary, recalls that some people in her congregation “lost their minds” when she indicated she wanted to become ordained, and they kept asking her, “Why are you doing this? Are you sure you can’t do something else?” “Finally,” she recounts, “the pastor gave me a date to preach [my licensing, or initial

43. Minerva G. Carcaño interview.

44. Minerva G. Carcaño interview.

45. Minerva G. Carcaño interview.

sermon], and the whole city was abuzz. They printed [an announcement] in the local newspaper . . . ; the place that held about two thousand people was packed. And [the pastor, at the last minute] cancelled it.” This happened to Simmons several more times over the space of a number of months before she eventually did preach her sermon and was licensed to preach.⁴⁶

Teresa Fry Brown recalls having six people in her AME ordination class: five men and herself. Fry Brown, whose husband divorced her when she decided to go into ministry, was a single mother. She said she expected opposition from men, but it was the older women in her home church who really made her life difficult. Some of them accused her of going into ministry so she could have sex with the men. Others acted out their opposition in more visual ways. “At that time,” she recounts, “we were worshipping in the education building, getting ready to build a new sanctuary. Whenever I was called to read a scripture, or do a prayer [this group of women] would literally stand up and turn their backs, turn the chairs around and sit with their backs to me.”⁴⁷

Certainly some of the Protestant women had very positive experiences in their first parishes. Jana Childers happily served a small New Jersey Presbyterian congregation for several years while she was in seminary at Princeton. Barbara Lundblad ended up serving in her first parish in New York City (Our Savior’s Atonement Lutheran Church) for over sixteen years.

But there were others who opted to go directly into PhD studies after seminary, in part because of the difficulty they had finding a job in a parish. Lucy Hogan recalls how difficult it was to find a job after she graduated from seminary. She said clergymen would just out and out lie to her that they didn’t have jobs, and the next thing she knew, they had hired one of her male classmates.

She also recalls that after she was ordained a priest in 1982, the Episcopal bishops voted in a “conscience clause” that allowed bishops in a diocese who opposed women’s ordination not to ordain women. Shortly

46. Martha Simmons interview.

47. Teresa Fry Brown interview.

thereafter Lucy's husband, who was a medical doctor in the Navy, was stationed in San Diego. Lucy, as a newly ordained priest from Minnesota, recalls visiting a local Episcopal church on a Sunday when the rector was absent because he was attending the church's General Convention. When he returned home, the rector called Lucy and said, "I understand you visited my church." She replied that she and her husband and son had visited. The rector then said, "I'd like to ask you not to do that again."⁴⁸ He didn't want an ordained woman worshipping in his congregation.

Christine Smith's story is the story, I fear, of far too many gay and lesbian folk who have answered the call of God to go into Christian ministry. As I've previously indicated, Chris grew up in the bosom of The United Methodist Church and felt a strong call to become a parish minister since her high school days. After graduating from seminary, she answered that call and went into parish ministry. But she says that she lived in constant fear of being outed and of losing either her church or her ordination or both. She pursued doctoral studies in preaching in order to chart a different career path for herself but testifies that her *true calling* was always to parish ministry. She later left The United Methodist Church for the United Church of Christ but also recounts standing in the midst of the seminary where she was teaching at the time she made her decision and weeping because she felt she had no choice but to do so.⁴⁹

The Challenges Continue

I share these stories with you because they give us just a glimpse into the reality of what contemporary clergywomen have had to go through to exercise their callings in Christ's church. And women are still struggling. I know outstanding clergywomen who, when they reach midlife, find it almost impossible to find a job in the parish appropriate for their gifts and capabilities because the preference for younger clergy or male clergy is so strong on the part of congregations. I know younger clergywomen who find that their denominations will ordain them but then give them

48. Lucy Lind Hogan interview.

49. Christine Marie Smith interview.

no help in finding parish-based jobs. And of course, there are still far too many LGBTQ+ clergy who live in constant fear of losing their jobs or their ordinations, or who are finding it impossible to be ordained at all in churches they dearly love.

Furthermore, there are still seminary students—including students I taught in recent years—who struggle to make their way in the church. I think of that Pentecostal student I taught who finally got her church body in Texas to ordain her but never could find a parish to serve within her denomination, so she ended up switching denominations and going through the entire ordination process all over again in the United Church of Christ. I think of that Roman Catholic Latina student I taught who had a fire in her bones to preach and finally announced to our class one day that she had begun preaching online, because God had called her and no one was going to stop her from exercising her gifts. And I think of a Korean American woman in my very last Women's Ways of Preaching class who also had a fire in her belly for preaching, who was quite a gifted preacher, but who seemed to face opposition to her voice and leadership at almost every turn.

As the statistics clearly show, we have come a long way during the past sixty years in ordaining more clergywomen, and in welcoming women into the pulpits of this land. I rejoice in and celebrate that reality. But we still have a way to go. As Lucy Hogan reminds us, "It is still the case that over half the church women of the world cannot be ordained."⁵⁰

And a part of what we need to do is to become the best advocates we can be for opening the pulpit to all women. I was struck when I interviewed these sixteen women preachers and teachers of preaching, at how many pointed to clergymen who had mentored them in their early years in ministry, had opened their pulpits to them, and had encouraged them to become all they were created to be. I was also struck by how important to these women was the support and encouragement of women—both lay and clergy—who would advocate for them and refuse to quit pressing the church to fully embrace them and their God-given callings.

50. Lucy Lind Hogan interview.

Yes, we've come a long way. But before we are tempted to rest on our laurels we also need to take a look at history that predates the past sixty years—the stories of preaching women who embraced their calls long before their denominations even thought about ordaining women—and ask, “*What was it that empowered them and gave them courage to persevere in their callings when church and society so strongly opposed them? And what do we learn from their witness about how to keep persevering in our own day and time?*”

That history, or rather “herstory,” is the focus of chapter 2.

KAROLINE M. LEWIS



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FIVE KEYS TO LEADING WITH INTEGRITY

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Chapter One

ACCOMPANIMENT

Accompaniment

Abide with Me

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.
Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see—
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.
I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.
I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.
Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.¹

—Henry Francis Lyte

1. Hymn text by Henry Francis Lyte, written in 1847.

Chapter One

ACCOMPANIMENT

OBSERVATIONS

Pay attention to your patterns. The ways you learned to survive may not be the ways you want to continue to live. Shift and heal.

—Unknown

Jesus's first act as a leader was to accompany his disciples. When we recall that the fundamental meaning of *paraclete* is the one who is called to be alongside others, we realize that the first principle of Christian leadership is not a characteristic but a way of being. When Jesus says to his disciples, "I am sending you another *paraclete*," it is not only a statement about his own ministry, but it also indicates the principle reality of what a leader who claims to be Christian then does. The promise of the *paraclete* solidifies the fact that essential to Christian leadership is not a set of skills but being a consistent presence.

Being a leader with a "Christian" identity demands that there are observable and distinctive ways of being and, therefore, of leading, by making intentional connections to Jesus's own embodiment of leadership. It is not enough to assume that your faith is a sufficient category by which to

Accompaniment

define “Christian” when you identify as a Christian leader. It is incumbent upon us to strive for ways to articulate what it means to be a Christian leader; that is, what it means to be a leader who embodies the very leadership of Jesus. The word *Christian* was never meant to be merely adjectival. *Christian* signals a relationship with Jesus, without which we are, and would be, like any other leader.

This is challenging work. The human propensity to make comparisons, especially in ways able to be measured, is not going away anytime soon. As ministry is inherently an activity of delayed gratification, the ability to chart *any* indicators of supposed success is a temptation that is terribly hard to resist. And yet, to what extent has the church abandoned theological integrity for institutional survival? The sky may be falling, the church may be dying, but the canary in the coal mine has never been the church’s inability to adapt. It has been, and will likely continue to be, a cry from the cross. When our calling to reimagine leadership in the church is a return to the premises and promises of the gospel, we should expect resistance. We will appear traditionalist, unable to innovate, or unrealistic in our ideal of recovering the past glory of the church. But the gospel, as the promise of the presence of God, has always been a forward-looking truth.

As noted above, much talk about leadership in the church these days is about leadership characteristics or traits that are effective for success, but rarely do we come across a discussion about whether these traits actually embody who you are or who God has called you to be. Identifying markers of Jesus’s leadership are manifestations of being and identity, not skills to learn, characteristics for which to strive, or techniques to apply. Fundamentally, Christian leadership is not a set of prescribed descriptors but rather an embodiment of our relationship with Jesus Christ, with God, and with the Holy Spirit.

Chapter One

When the incarnation becomes the foundational premise for leadership in the church, relationship is then at the core of the church leader. The very idea of incarnation assumes that relationship will be absolutely central. Accompaniment is the embodiment of relationship. It is no wonder, however, that the church has a tendency to shy away from this inherent aspect of the church's calling. To hold relationship as the hallmark of leadership ultimately leads to less-than-controlled realities and, more often than not, out-of-control situations. Relationships are innately unstable and unpredictable. They eschew prediction and demand flexibility. None of these resulting qualities are necessarily those that most leaders are willing to profess.

If you are reading this book, then you have sensed this disconnection of relationship and leadership and want to do something about it. Leading with integrity, regardless of venue, is not for the faint of heart. An integrated leader is often met with suspicion and often seen as one having it just "too much together." Integrated leaders lead from their truth, and few people have the courage to figure out and name the truth about themselves. It is easier to adopt acceptable characteristics and mainstream measures and adapt to trends rather than engage in the hard work of self-reflection and self-interpretation. Without the church's leaders' willingness to take a long look at themselves and admit where they have given up on theology for the sake of productivity, the church will blend into its surroundings; it will mold itself to the latest fads and be almost indiscernible as the embodiment of God's love in the world. The church would do well to hear once again and take to heart Paul's admonishment of the Galatians: "I'm amazed that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ to follow another gospel" (Gal 1:6).

THEOLOGICAL PREMISE

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.

—Aristotle

Committing to leadership in the church that relies on scripture is risky. After all, what could the Bible possibly offer the church for imagination in leadership in this day and age? From Moses to the kings to the prophets to religious representatives, none are exempt from critique. Such witness does not leave us very eager to explore the leadership elements of these persons charged with commanding the people of God. But central in scripture is the importance of accompaniment as a designation of God's very identity. God has been committed to accompaniment all along, as we see in Leviticus: "I will walk around among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people" (26:12). Exodus narrates the construction of the tent or tabernacle for the ark of the covenant so that God can indeed go wherever God's people go. God's accompaniment is a primary theological theme in the book of Numbers, as the Israelites travel from Mount Sinai to the promised land:

They marched from the LORD's mountain for three days. The LORD's chest containing the covenant [ark of the covenant] marched ahead of them for three days to look for a resting place for them. Now the LORD's cloud was over them by day when they marched from the camp. When the chest set out, Moses would say, "Arise, LORD, let your enemies scatter, and those who hate you flee." When it rested, he would say, "Return, LORD of the ten thousand thousands of Israel." (Num 10:33-36)

God's dwelling with God's people is especially noted when God's presence is called into question. God promises to accompany God's people no matter where they are. As a leader in the church, another way to imagine accompaniment, therefore, is this kind of promised divine dwelling.

The Fourth Evangelist recognizes that in Jesus, God is once again tabernacling with us. John's Gospel, just as with the Synoptic Gospels,

Chapter One

addresses the theological crisis of the destruction of the temple and the razing of Jerusalem by the Roman Empire in 70 CE. Without the temple, the presence of God was again uncertain. Each of the four evangelists responds to this defining moment in very distinct ways, presenting portraits of Jesus that both offer their interpretations of the person and work of Christ and seek to address this apparent absence of God. For John, Jesus is both the presence of God and is God. The particularity and inseparability of these two promises lie at the very heart of Jesus-as-leader in the Gospel of John. Jesus's presence and Jesus's identity, Jesus's accompaniment and Jesus's being, are distinctive and yet indissoluble. God's being, to be present, is God's very nature. For God to dwell among us is central to who God is. God cannot NOT be with us. It is an expression of God's very heart.

Additional evidence of this truth of God is the temple incident in John. In the Fourth Gospel, the temple incident—that is, the story of Jesus entering the temple, turning over its tables, and verbally critiquing temple practices—is moved from the end of Jesus's public ministry to the very beginning of Jesus's public ministry (John 2:13-22). Whereas in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the temple incident is the provocation for Jesus's arrest, in John, the impetus is raising Lazarus from the dead. The temple incident, therefore, has a very different function in the Gospel of John compared to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For John, the temple incident is an affirmation of Jesus's true identity, as the "Word was God" (John 1:1). In John, the critique lodged against the temple is not "Stop making my Father's house a den of robbers" (see Matt 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48), with an assumed motive to call out some kind of corruption, but "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace" (John 2:13-16). However, the temple as a marketplace was essential for the survival of the Jewish religious sacrificial system. The pilgrimage festivals—Passover, Weeks, and Booths—necessitated exchanges for proper sacrifices, typically grains traded

for the required animal sacrifice. Basically, Jesus says that the entire system is unnecessary in part because he is and will be the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrificial lamb (John 1:29), and also because the temple is no longer the location of God. God is present in Jesus, the I AM, the Word made flesh.

The function of the temple incident in John, stating Jesus's true identity, is reinforced by the exchange between Jesus and the temple authorities. Jesus says to them: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The temple priests respond: "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?" (v. 20). John's narrator then clarifies Jesus's statement: "But the temple Jesus was talking about was his body" (v. 21). For the Fourth Evangelist, it is critical for us to know immediately the true identity of Jesus. Jesus is God and, therefore, Jesus's presence among us is a given.

In chapter 4, there is similar affirmation of Jesus's identity during the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well. When the Samaritan woman inquires of Jesus where the proper place to worship might be, when the Jews worshiped God in the temple in Jerusalem and the Samaritans offered their worship of God in the temple on Mount Gerazim, Jesus answers: "neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (v. 21). In other words, God's presence is no longer in the temple but in the body of Jesus Christ. God's presence is no longer a building but a person. God's presence is God's being.

John 1:14 asserts that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us or lived among us. The word translated as "lived/dwelt" is *skenao*, which means "to tent or to tabernacle." God, in Jesus, is once again tenting among God's people, but in Jesus, God is not only going where they go but also is who they are. In other words, God's accompaniment cannot be separated from God's identity; the dwelling of God is not just something that God does but who God desires, even has to be. We find this same promise in the book of Revelation, the only other New Testament book in the New Testament besides the Gospel of John that uses the term *skenao*. The final

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theological theme and image in Revelation is God's city, the New Jerusalem, coming down so that once again God can dwell with God's people:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling [tabernacle] is here with humankind. He will dwell [tabernacle] with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Rev 21:1-4)

This promise would have been especially critical for the churches to whom the book of Revelation was written, which were experiencing internal ecclesial challenges and even more dire pressures and persecutions from the outside world, particularly from the power of the Roman Empire. One of the primary themes of apocalyptic literature is to reiterate God's presence and power in the midst of what seems to be God's absence and ineffective sovereignty.

What difference does this scriptural narration make for how we think about accompaniment as a leader in the church? We begin to realize that accompaniment is not just a characteristic of God's leadership or of Jesus's leadership, but that accompaniment is who God is, who Jesus is. Accompaniment, therefore, is not a skill one lists on a resumé for a job in church leadership but is that by which one embodies who God has been as God, as the Word made flesh, and, now, as the promise of the *paraclete*.

Accompaniment intimates a distinctive kind of authority. The promise of God's accompaniment is reiterated in those times when God's presence appears to be most needed or most questioned. This suggests that accompaniment becomes necessary especially in periods of vulnerability, fear, and uncertainty. As a result, the kind of accompaniment in which the church leader engages is not a mere ministry of presence but a true sense

of an embodied divine pathos. It is a kind of accompaniment that is not simply about being present but is about recognizing that this moment might indicate a theological crisis: Is God really here?

THE PROMISE OF THE PARACLETE

*I used to think that the worst thing in life was to end up alone. It's not.
The worst thing in life is to end up with people who make you feel alone.*

—Robin Williams

“I am sending you another *paraclete*” recalls Jesus’s accompaniment of his disciples during the course of his public ministry and also looks forward to the necessity of this accompaniment going forward. Here, Jesus’s words remember the entirety of his ministry in this one word, *paraclete*. Because Jesus had already been the *paraclete*, then this image, this promise, this metaphor, is the lens through which to interpret his three-year ministry.

This accompaniment manifests itself in a variety of ways throughout the rest of the Farewell Discourse. First, the *paraclete* abides: “You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (John 14:17 NRSV). Next, “the Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of everything I told you” (John 14:26). The *paraclete* witnesses for the sake of Jesus: “When the Companion comes, whom I will send from the Father—the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me” (John 15:26). Jesus also notes that when he leaves, he will then send the *paraclete*: “When he comes, he will show the world it was wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. He will show the world it was wrong about sin because they don’t believe in me. He will show the world it was wrong about righteousness because I’m going to the Father and you won’t see me anymore. He will show the world it was wrong about judgment because

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this world's ruler stands condemned" (John 16:8-11). This accompaniment is primarily because of the weight the disciples will be asked to carry. It is an accompaniment for the sake of pastoral presence and comfort: "I have much more to say to you, but you can't handle it now. However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and proclaim it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine. That's why I said that the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you" (John 16:12-15). And yet, the first reference to the *paraclete* does not articulate these specific activities that the Spirit will carry out but emphasizes the *paraclete's* presence, being, companionship, and the walking alongside others.

We noted above that Jesus provides a retrospective description of the kind of leader he has been when he promises the disciples that God will send "another Companion" (John 14:16). Jesus himself has already been the *paraclete* for his disciples. At the same time, John casts the conceptual net a little wider by presenting accompaniment also as abiding. In other words, before the introduction of *paraclete* in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus has been the *paraclete* for his disciples through the primary expression of *abide*, or in Greek, *menō*.

Used over forty times in the Gospel of John, *menō*, which is translated as "abide, remain, stay, continue," is the central word that describes the relationship the believer has with Jesus. To abide is to believe, is to be in an intimate relationship with both Jesus and God. To abide is to come into the presence of God, the presence of Jesus. Relationship with Jesus is both initiated and confirmed in abiding. Accompaniment is an invitation and commitment to relationship. If we track the references of the use of *abiding* prior to the *paraclete* and the Farewell Discourse, abiding leads to

believing, which then ends in relationship that brings about abundant life (John 10:10).

The first use of *menō* occurs in the calling of the disciples:

The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus walking along he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, “What are you looking for?” They said, “Rabbi (which is translated *Teacher*), where are you staying?” He replied, “Come and see.” So they went and saw where he was staying [*menō*], and they remained [*menō*] with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated *Christ*). He led him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated *Peter*). (John 1:35-42)

Abiding with Jesus leads to affirmation of Jesus’s identity, “We have found the Messiah,” and this revelation of Jesus as the Christ then results in the invitation to others to abide with Jesus. Jesus’s identity cannot be fully known unless you yourself abide with Jesus. To abide with Jesus is the promise of Jesus’s accompaniment. Abiding indicates believing in, and relationship with, Jesus. The vine-and-branches metaphor in the Farewell Discourse is the last “I AM” statement in John with a predicate nominative, “I AM the vine,” and the last affirmation from Jesus about the mutual abiding between him and his disciples, “Remain (abide/*menō*) in me, and I will remain in you” (John 15:4). After the vine and the branches, the only two other occurrences of abide/*menō* after the Farewell Discourse (the last occurrence in 15:16) are in 19:31 and 21:22-23, neither of which indicates a relational connection. That is, once the promise of the *paraclete* is given, the *paraclete* takes over the accompaniment. The *paraclete* embodies abiding. “This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives [*menō*] with you and will be with you” (John 14:17).

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The theological promise of accompaniment is both God's promise and is also filled with promise for the Christian leader. Accompaniment, therefore, is not simply something that we do, but it embodies who Jesus was for his disciples and then who the Holy Spirit was, and is, for believers, both then and now. We embody accompaniment, commit to accompaniment, and do accompaniment because this was who Jesus was as a leader. Accompaniment is central to Jesus's mission and vision, in part because accompaniment is born out of relationship and thus also maintains relationship. Beginning and encouraging relationship, therefore, appears to be a hallmark for how Jesus understood his ministry and himself as one who leads.

The accompaniment of the *paraclete* is literarily, or narratively, embodied in the Farewell Discourse. The discourses about the Holy Spirit are not localized into one chapter or section as a single presentation. Rather, that which the *paraclete* will do, what Jesus has already done, is interspersed throughout the Farewell Discourse, and thus experienced by the disciples, in chapter 14 (14:8-17, 25-27), chapter 15 (15:26-27), and chapter 16 (16:4b-11). In other words, the Farewell Discourse's narrative mode underscores the theological claim of the *paraclete's* presence. The promise of the *paraclete* as one who accompanies is not just something to know but something to be felt and experienced, through the hearing and reading of the Farewell Discourse itself.

Accompaniment is also who the disciples are for each other. Another term representing accompaniment is the word *friend*: "I don't call you servants any longer . . . I call you friends" (John 15:15). We might assume that the concept of "friend" does not allow for a kind of necessary autonomy in leadership, especially when it comes to making hard decisions or to inevitable confrontation. In doing so, however, we will not have taken into account the understanding of friendship in the ancient world. Friendship was not a mere expression of affection or an emotional construction but

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intimated social responsibilities and assumed a bond that demanded values, virtues, and obligations.²

By using the word *friend* between the first reference to the *paraclete* in John (14:8-17, 25-27) and the second reference (15:26-27), Jesus suggests that there is an essential mutuality in accompaniment; that the one who accompanies needs the ones being accompanied, just as the one needs the accompanier. Jesus indicates an inherent reciprocity in accompanying by removing hierarchy—a hierarchy that the church has embedded into its own leadership models and which the church has implemented without much thought. To use the word *leader* fundamentally implies that there are followers. As such, it cannot be the only term the church uses to define how its leaders operate.

We tend to get nervous about these kinds of equilateral leadership designs. We are afraid to lose our own power, we are fearful of what might happen if power gets into the wrong hands, and we are especially anxious when we have to come face-to-face with our own privilege. We assume that if power is too evenly distributed, then it will result in a lack of direction and focus, or result in a lack of mission and vision. Yet, a careful reading of the description of the accompaniment of the *paraclete* in John yields a helpful corrective to such fears. We discover that this accompanier will testify to the Truth (John 15:26-27), show the world it was wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8), guide and teach (16:13), and speak whatever is heard (16:13). In fact, one of the primary characteristics of friendship is boldness of speech and action. The Gospel of John references *parresia* (“openly,” “boldly”) more than any other New Testament book (7:4, 13, 26; 10:24; 11:14, 54; 16:25, 29; 18:20). Friendship, as it turns out, is not for the faint of heart. Accompaniment is not simply having someone beside you. Accompaniment is not a mere ministry of presence. Accompaniment means active and assertive abiding—an abiding

2. Gail R. O'Day, “Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* (vol 58, issue 2, April 1, 2004): 144–57.

that enters into places of fear and discomfort, uncertainty, and troubled hearts, and speaks the truth freely.

THE MOTHER OF JESUS

*The only clear line I draw these days is this: when my religion tries to come
between me and my neighbor, I will choose my neighbor. . .
Jesus never commanded me to love my religion.*

—Barbara Brown Taylor

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the character in John who most clearly embodies *Key One: Accompaniment*. In John's Gospel, Jesus's mother appears only twice. First, Mary is present at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), which was Jesus's first public act of ministry in the Fourth Gospel; and second, she is present at the foot of the cross, along with the beloved disciple (John 19:26-27). Jesus's mother brackets his entire ministry. Such narrative *inclusio* communicates accompaniment. Mary has been there all along, of course before turning water into wine, but specifically, Mary is the one who abides with Jesus and accompanies Jesus during his entire ministry. No other character accompanies Jesus like she does in the Gospel of John. Certainly, the disciples accompany Jesus, but none is present at the cross except the beloved disciple, who was first introduced in John 13:23, and his mother. Because of his mother, Jesus knows what it is like to be accompanied, which then enables Jesus to embody the same.

In the example of Mary, we can see other features of the Christian leader as one who accompanies. First, embodying accompaniment means being present at critical moments, as well as being present in the day-to-day rhythms of life. Mary is there at Jesus's first miracle, the first sign, the first act that will expose him, bring him out into the open, and after which there is no going back. She is present in his ultimate exposure on the cross, in his unspeakable suffering, and when Jesus takes his last breath. Embodying

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accompaniment recognizes these places and spaces of vulnerability, fear, and pain; it means recognizing the poignancy of the moment, the pathos of the moment, and your own role in and responsibility for that moment. In other words, Mary accompanies Jesus in his most acute instances of vulnerability. She sees in these moments the absolute necessity of her presence, of her abiding. This is more than being a compassionate leader or a heart-felt leader. It is a total embodiment of the other's vulnerability and then entering into that space. Embodying accompaniment is true empathy.

Second, embodying accompaniment means encouragement of the other's God-given potential, but even more so, it means naming *where* God needs someone to be and *who* God needs someone to be. The sum of the Farewell Discourse in the Gospel of John is Jesus embodying this very aspect of accompaniment. As Jesus prepares for his impending arrest, he knows that the hour has come for the end of his ministry and the end of the incarnation, and he is specific about what he needs his disciples to do and who he needs them to be in his absence. And so, Jesus tells his disciples to love one another (John 13:31-35), tells them to bear much fruit (John 15:1-17), and sends them into the world (17:18; cf., 20:23). These "commandments" of Jesus are all different expressions of one mission: to be the I AM in the world when Jesus cannot be. The entire presentation of discipleship in the Gospel of John rests on a principle of accompaniment, to accompany the world as the disciples themselves were accompanied by Jesus.

Without Jesus's mother embodying accompaniment as encouragement, at least according to John, Jesus's public ministry would never have gotten off the ground. At the wedding at Cana, when the wine runs out, Jesus's mother notes the wedding faux pas to her son. Jesus's response is not a dismissal of her but an inability, at least in that moment, to recognize that he has the power to do something to change the situation. As a result, Jesus's mother tells the chief steward, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Jesus offers two commands, both of which are obeyed, and the

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result is a miracle of abundance: “Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water,’ and they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, ‘Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter,’ and they did” (John 2:7-8). The six jars, each holding twenty to thirty gallons of water, are replaced with that same amount of premium wine and filled to the brim. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus’s empowerment for his public ministry comes from his baptism and his ability to resist Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. In John, Jesus’s baptism is downplayed, and the temptation in the wilderness is omitted. Rather, Jesus is emboldened to take the first step into his public ministry, to take the first step into embodying his own identity, by his mother’s accompaniment, by her encouragement, and by her ability to see and identify his power. It is Mary’s accompaniment that makes it possible for Jesus’s ministry to get off the ground.

Jesus’s mother’s words, “do whatever he tells you,” have a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy as the narrative unfolds. For the people who encounter Jesus and who follow his instructions just as his mother had set forth, life and relationship follow. Both the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years (in John 5) and the man who had been blind since birth (in John 9) obey Jesus’s commands. To the first, Jesus commands: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk” (5:8) and the man is immediately healed and able to walk. To the second man, Jesus commands: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (this word means *sent*)” (John 9:7), and the blind man is able to see. But more so, both men are reconnected to their communities and restored to their relationships. In other words, accompaniment as embodiment of encouragement is for the sake of much more than a quick fix, a doable solution, or a problem’s immediate reversal. It is for the sake of life and relationship, and for the sake of then embodying the joy and wonder of that relationship in the world. That is, accompaniment encourages accompaniment. You cannot imagine accompanying, or know how to accompany another, without being accompanied yourself.

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3. Reflect on the following reading. The metaphors we use to make sense of how we live embodied lives suggest key aspects of how we make connections among who we are, what we do, how we live, and how we lead.

Following the Thread

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.³

3. William Stafford, *Ask Me: 100 Essential Poems* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf, 2014).

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4. Consider the following benediction and how it might correspond to the idea of accompaniment and its components.

For a Leader

May you have the grace and wisdom

To act kindly, learning

To distinguish between what is

Personal and what is not.

May you be hospitable to criticism.

May you never put yourself at the center of things.

May you act not from arrogance but out of service.

May you work on yourself,

Building up and refining the ways of your mind.

May those who work for you know

You see and respect them.

May you learn to cultivate the art of presence

In order to engage with those who meet you.

When someone fails or disappoints you,

May the graciousness with which you engage

Be their stairway to renewal and refinement.

May you treasure the gifts of the mind

Through reading and creative thinking

So that you continue as a servant of the frontier

Accompaniment

Where the new will draw its enrichment from the old,
And you never become functionary.

May you know the wisdom of deep listening,
The healing of wholesome words,
The encouragement of the appreciative gaze,
The decorum of held dignity,
The springtime edge of the bleak question.

May you have a mind that loves frontiers
So that you can evoke the bright fields
That lie beyond the view of the regular eye.

May you have good friends
To mirror your blind spots.

May leadership be for you
A true adventure of growth.⁴

4. John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 151–52.



Lisa L. Thompson

ingenuity

Preaching as an Outsider

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“What an insightful, provocative, and practically helpful book this is! Lisa Thompson not only illustrates how and why Black women struggle to find acceptance and recognition as preachers; she also posits multiple ways in which these women preach with risk, imagination and ingenuity, offering specific examples from their sermons. In addition she identifies strategies whereby any preacher who has been labeled as “other” can craft sermons that defy the norms of conventionality, while also honoring the best of their traditions. A great book for both personal and classroom use.”

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Lisa L. Thompson

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Preaching as an Outsider

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chapter 1

When Bodies and Unimaginative Practice Collide

A preacher's use of tradition has less to do with her acting and sounding like a man, sounding like a woman, giving away her voice, or acquiescing to power and more to do with reimagining expectations for her own purposes. Such a process of reimagining is undergirded and colored by the preacher's own ways of knowing—her voice. A preacher riffs off the expectations of preaching for the sake of her message, her process of constructing meaning, and preaching in her context. This riffing is the work of every preacher.

When a preacher uses a tradition for her own purposes in preaching, these are the moments in which she creatively invents without complete conformity. As one riffs without complete conformity and is allowed to do so, she most fully comes into her preaching voice in community. Her use of the tools at hand creates the opportunity to curate an alternative vision of preaching in the community. Preaching and the ability to make play on expectations become the mechanisms by which one comes into her preaching voice, reshapes communal understandings of preaching, and in its fullest expressions reshapes a community's frameworks of faith.

At minimum this reconstruction is one that expands confining assumptions about who is and who is not a legitimate proclaimer. At best this reconstruction shifts problematic ideologies that afforded such

limitations to exist in the first place. Through preaching we are able to help a community fully embrace an otherwise minoritized body in its pulpit space. Preaching also opens opportunities for a community to interrogate its assumptions about who cannot create meaning with and on behalf of the community. Preaching holds the potential to shift the ways in which a community can “listen to a woman say it” and respond with “Yes!” as opposed to meeting a woman with silence or lack of affirmation while needing to hear a man say “it” before responding with a “Yes!”

Although the process of engaging a community’s expectations for the sake of preaching is the work of every preacher in time, when black women undertake these actions their actions have a distinct outcome and texture. The location of black women in both their communities and the wider world places demands upon their voices in the work of overcoming obstacles to have their truth received. In preaching, black women have the task of deciding how they will or will not negotiate expectations about their abilities to speak and offer valid speech for the sake of the entire community. And as they make these negotiations, the preaching of black women has the possibility to reconstruct problematic ideologies as they call forward implicit assumptions related to the performativity, value, and place of black womanhood.

Black. Woman. Preacher.

The concurrent existence of black, woman, and preacher reflexively shapes black women’s preaching practices. The experiences of being black, woman, and preacher simultaneously converge in the world of the-black-preaching-woman, establishing a particular persona. In addition, there are the expectations of the listener. In other words, the content and style of black women’s preaching are extensions of both their social location and the high expectations of their preaching.

Social location and religious practices are not mutually exclusive entities in the lives of black women; they overlap with one another. Their overlap often relegates black women to an outsider-within position, not only in life at-large, but also in their communities of faith. If we are to

engage the preaching of black women on its own terms, we cannot adequately do so without considering how their lived experiences are shaped by the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender. The experiences of present-day black women in North America are connected to a history that differentiates their experiences of racism from those of black men and their experiences of sexism from those of other women.

One aspect of black women's history in North America is the experience of being a captured—or *caged*—group for the social and economic gain of other individuals. The most recognizable aspects of this captivity are in the transatlantic slave trade. The less visible, but no less stigmatizing, aspects of being caged are the domestic servitude that followed the era of slavery and its ongoing mutations; their offspring yield income gaps, healthcare disparities, and higher death rates for these women in the twenty-first century. The realities of slavery and servitude are portraits of the social, and conversely economic, categories to which others have assigned black women based on race and gender. Indeed, both institutions were concrete realities and continue to loom as metaphors for the system of social control that still mitigate black women's struggles for social equality.¹ Black women's assigned social locations have often led to their erasure, invisibility, and a controlled narrative surrounding the significance of their presence in history.²

The limited power given to black women to record and document their own *herstory* perpetuates ideologies about them as opposed to promoting their writing and inscribing their own identities. We see this limited power in the sparse historical documents of black women's preaching and sermons that predate the twentieth century.³ The result is the perpetuation of descriptors placed upon black women, or none at all, as opposed to descriptions and documentation of the lives of black women written by black women. Historically, black women, as both *black* and *woman*, remain(ed) as outsiders-within⁴ movements that have been classified as either black or woman, as their voices are not directly engaged in conversations that pertain to their existence. Our understandings of preaching are not excluded from this critique, yet these understandings are further shaped by the gendered dynamics in communities of faith.

chapter 1

As communities of faith adopt theological ideas and explications of suffering from early Christian traditions, they simultaneously solidify troublesome gender relations and the injustices perpetuated by such understandings of gender and power. The early Christian traditions rely on themes of male dominance, righteousness versus unrighteousness, and sanctified suffering. The acceptance and adoption of theological ideals and explications of suffering inherent in the Christian tradition have yet to be *fully* interrogated by faith communities on the ground under the guise of liberation and its implications on the lives and status of black women. This lack of robust interrogation of the tradition by some faith communities results in ongoing gendered power imbalances within these same communities. Many churches continue to relegate the position of black women to a subordinate status.

The symptomatic issues of the intra-group tension between black women and men are demonstrated through the struggles of women who preach, pastor, serve, and attend predominantly black Protestant churches in the United States.⁵ Women account for the largest base in black church congregations yet are disproportionately represented in roles of pastoral leadership. While women are often excluded from positions of primary leadership along with ministries of teaching and preaching at senior levels, women are “allowed” to pursue the positions of administrative assistants, teachers of children and of some adult Sunday school classes, and leaders of women’s auxiliaries; they are also expected to fully support if not undergird the financial vitality of the churches. Both men and women restrict the participation of women within churches, yet their participation is vital within these churches for the institution’s flourishing and continued existence.

These politics of power have led to conceptualizing the black preacher as black and male in rather robust narratives and images. The robust depiction of the black preacher as specifically male sharply contrasts with an underdeveloped, if not lacking, image of the-black-preaching-woman. This underdeveloped image of the-black-preaching-woman leads to underdeveloped understandings of black women’s preaching ministries. Evidence of these underdeveloped aspects of both the-black-preaching-woman and her preaching is found within their absorption into conversa-

tions about black and women's preaching traditions via limited distinction from their preaching peers in a way that accounts for their experiences as both black and woman.⁶ The-black-preaching-woman becomes invisible within discourses about black preaching, as often these discourses have focused historically on black men; likewise, the-black-preaching-woman becomes invisible within discourses about women's preaching, as these discourses have focused historically on white women. All the women are white; all the preachers are men.⁷

It is important to say a word here to discourage monolithic narratives about what it means to be a black-preaching-woman. Even as race, class, and gender are common contributing factors in the lives of black women, thus requiring the categories of black and woman to be interrogated more fully, we cannot assume a common experience amongst black women. All black women do not respond to and experience the meeting of race, sexuality, class, and gender in the same manner.⁸ There are a variety of black women's experiences, and with these different experiences comes different forms of outsider-within privileges. For instance, the distinctives between women from different socioeconomic backgrounds is palpable. The ongoing iterations of race, class, and gendered discrimination in the lives of black women, as opposed to symmetry in experience, allow us to retain social location as an important starting point in understanding their lives, religious practices, and preaching.

Every black woman does not struggle with trusting her judgment or preaching voice. But to be sure, we live in a world that has violently contested the presence of black women's voices and bodies. These contestations are not disconnected from racist, sexist, and classist frameworks. And these frameworks are connected to the invisibility and erasure of a complex portrait of black-preaching-women, especially within communities of faith.

The Limits and Dangers of Unimaginative Practice

When preaching and its hopes are conflated with the presence or absence of a particular body, that body inherently restricts the possibility of

preaching. Preaching becomes an unimaginative practice. The fields in which proclamation may occur are now limited, narrowed, and confined. This mirrored illusion of preaching that is perpetuated by communal rigidity closes preaching off from its own possibilities—the free-expression, unlimited, and unrestrained encounter of sacred-in-breaking. The spirit of God that enables preaching through her free will has now been confined to a community’s terms and conditions.

These expectations of preaching have undermined the very rationale of preaching and have replaced it with bodily productions. The oxygen that gave preaching its very purpose and hopes is restricted. And the result is death unto preaching itself, as it permeates into a synthetic image and illusion of itself. And concretely, in this same way historically, the expectation of a particular and preferred type of masculinity in bodily productions of preaching has pushed preaching into a practice of production and imitation. Preaching has been replaced by the politics of the pulpit as a gendered space,⁹ and it is this space that regulates the practice of preaching more than the hope of preaching itself.

As opposed to existing as a practice that generates fully new possibilities, the ephemeral scaffolding of preaching has closed preaching off from its own possibilities. In turn, this narrowed scope collides with the bodies that are most marginalized, are least valued, or are desired invisible by the community. This collision happens as these bodies listen to what is offered through preaching and especially when they themselves attempt to preach.

The Collision of Unimaginative Practice with Real Bodies

The push-and-pull experienced by black women who preach is a distinct result of unimaginative practice and bodies others desire to be invisible. There are organizing principles (scaffolding) that have established what *black preaching* is and, in return, what the “black sermon” looks and sounds like. These organizing principles have been proliferated within and outside communities of faith. This ephemeral scaffolding is influenced by

wider cultural myths about black preaching that do not escape racist stereotypes of black performance, which will be discussed further in chapter 2. The established image of the black preacher continues to advance an understanding and practice of preaching in the flesh, and in this regard it continues to reinforce these same established images and practices of black preaching. Depictions of the black male as preacher and the safeguarding of male privilege within black churches regulate the framework of preaching. The framework creates a largely unvaried understanding of black preaching within its various contexts of depiction, while it continues alongside the larger ongoing practice of preaching.¹⁰ Black women's preaching practices are often in juxtaposition to the established image of the black preacher, which is overwhelmingly associated with a black male and a particular performance of masculinity.¹¹

The image of the black preacher presents a male with rhetorical prowess, a voice of thunder, and the ability to move the community to ecstasy highs while weaving together the life of the text and life in the world.¹² Similarly, black preaching is etched as holding in tension the experience of the community with an all-powerful God; it is emotive, keeping with a particular rhythm and cadence, and includes aspects of celebration that intentionally bring the heart, body, and mind together in the preaching moment. Whether individuals actively resist or adopt this practice of preaching, it functions as a narrative that links black preaching to a particular performance of masculinity in pulpit space and rhetoric. Thus, it links the practice of preaching to masculinity, privileging the bodily productions of a particular type of a heterosexual black cisgender male over the hopes of an encounter with proclamation.

There has not been "one conductor" or "wizard" behind the image's perpetuation; to the contrary, the image has been "collectively orchestrated" by various facets of history.¹³ Black women also engage and participate in this understanding when they preach, both by force and choice. Women, who preach within these traditions, constantly imagine and invent their sermons in conversation with and in juxtaposition to the tradition and its inherent power in a community; this requires both creativity and ingenuity¹⁴ for the sake of (re)imagining both the sermon

and preaching. The result is a spectrum of approaches to preaching by black women, who are aware of the elusive yet overt parameters that mark “legitimate” preaching.

When expectations centered on performances of masculinity determine what is and is not valid preaching, these expectations render black women as bodies of difference or bodies desired to be unseen in the pulpit (desired invisible). Black women are displaced from the pulpit and their citizenship status within the community is that of outsider. As these women continue to participate within these communities and around these understandings of preaching, they are inextricably a part of a system.

However, as they are embedded within the structures of these communal expectations, they also creatively engage the power postulated by the tradition and its guardians. Their preaching is the tactical expression of their own creativity and ingenuity.¹⁵ Black preaching women riff off of the expectations of preaching and its ephemeral scaffolding, for the sake of the hope and ethics preaching espouses—a word from God that fosters life abundant. As they do this, preaching becomes the means by which synthetic practices of preaching are disrupted in both more hushed and resounding ways; in turn, the community generates new possibilities and means of understanding preaching as its members are able to say, “This ‘too’ is preaching!”¹⁶

Womanist practical theologians and homileticians intentionally work to name the resounding ways of disrupting synthetic faith practices that are overwhelmingly male preferential. Evelyn Parker notes that one of the concerns germane to womanist practical theology is the consideration for how “pastoral and ecclesial praxis bring about life-giving ministries for the flourishing of black women and girls, the black community, and the entire world.”¹⁷ To these ends, homiletician Teresa Fry Brown describes black women’s preaching as a practice that can directly confront injustices and transform religious spaces and traditions. She specifically describes black women’s preaching as having the potential to “renovate sorrow’s kitchen” (her metaphor for the black church) through using the “tools of renovation.”¹⁸ The tools of renovation involve the preacher using “a fresh reading of the text” and “relentlessly engaging injustices,” as she articulates her

standard of justice and carves out her own space.¹⁹ Fry Brown makes clear that the presence of a black woman in the pulpit creates new visions for both the image of preacher and the image of justice; and it is equally clear that the work of the womanist preacher does not stop at pulpit presence. In a similar trajectory, Donna E. Allen pushes for a *trans-rationale* understanding of womanist preaching, which explicitly attends to the linguistic, ethical, and embodied dimensions of liberationist preaching by black women.²⁰ The emphasis in these intentional modes of disruption is the assumption that black women have the capacity to act and their actions have moral dimensions that affect their lives and the lives of their communities.

What follows builds upon these assumptions about the presence and experiences of black women as they intersect with pulpit spaces, while underscoring the more hushed but no less morally significant iterations of these encounters. Everyday women put their real bodies and expressions in contact with unimaginative and restrictive worship spaces; in their preaching we often witness fragments of equity and justice push through and sneak past the very structures that seek to render violence and injustice in their lives.²¹ As preachers better understand these working tools and tactics, they can make more strategic use of them for the sake of God's justice in the community and world.²² In short, framing preaching within the practice of ingenuity helps the preacher make greater use of the power to which she has access already.²³

An Act of Constrained Invention

Preaching is the act of invention. This act of invention requires pulling together pieces for something that does not yet exist—that is, the sermon. Every sermon begins with having “nothing yet” to preach. To develop a sermon requires weaving together loose edges until something new comes forth.²⁴ Preaching is an imaginative work. This work engages a very aesthetic process of pursuing one's best hunches and seeking rhythmic alignment among the ancient worlds of sacred texts, the contemporary world, and the preacher's own intuition. Often the process is one of creating alignment where it does not readily exist. This is the imagination

at work in preaching—finding similarities alongside dissimilarities for the sake of precision in message.²⁵ The imagination through preaching forges the contours of an invention that is more than the sum of its parts. The preacher has to imagine words into being where they do not yet exist.²⁶ Her imagining is inextricably connected to a community's ability to imagine. For the community has its own imaginings of the preacher, the sermon, and proclamation in its context.

In this creative process the one who preaches is in constant conversation with a tradition, expectations, and hopes as they are both named and unnamed within a community. These named and unnamed realities include the presumed limitations of what preaching is and is not. For example, a sermon is in conversation with a community's standards related to sermon length, timing, appropriate content, and determinations about how political and pastoral a message should be, about how overtly or subtly naming God and the presence of God is attended to in the message, and even how the preacher is personified in their contexts. The content, shape, and form of preaching are based upon blueprints constructed by a community.

Therefore, the aim here is to offer ways for us to consider expanding preaching as a practice, as we attend to its hopes even as we often engage a community's confining expectations of a sermon. I place these expectations in conversation with what we know and understand about preaching, homiletic theory, and preaching traditions, particularly black and women's preaching traditions. Turning to the sermon and its development becomes a means of broadening both our hopes and processes of preaching, particularly when considering individuals who preach from a minoritized place within a community. A sermon's content and structure are parts of the scaffolding that facilitate the preaching moment, the preacher's ability to overcome obstacles to their message, and the possibility of reshaping communal understandings. My intention is not to say what preaching cannot be, as much as it is to say *what more preaching might actually be and do*.

The following chapter explains ingenuity as a framing for a theology and practice of preaching that emerges from the preaching ministries

of black women. Ingenuity broadens understandings of the pulpit and preaching within a community; and at best, it espouses a sacred-in-breaking that reorients our ways of thinking, being, and doing for the sake of life at hand. Proclamation for black women is a generative disruption supported by creativity.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 attend to the shape of sermon development and design that builds upon ingenuity. These chapters mirror each other in format and are divided into four major sections with distinct tones. Each chapter is framed within an aspect of what listeners often expect in preaching, and then considers how those expectations intersect with the personhood of black women. The second section of these chapters analyzes how those expectations appear in the sermons of black women as they are navigated by preachers. The third section names how black women make creative use of the expectations under consideration. And, the final chapter section explores what this all might mean for sermon development as a whole, including practical helps for every preacher.

With this framework, chapter 3 explores how a preacher engages everyday life as a resource for message development. Engaging the experiences of black women as primary resources for preaching recovers narratives that are often ignored. A preacher's ability to effectively engage life in this manner often requires a subtle and seamless weaving of new narratives and familiar narratives.

Chapter 4 names the use of scripture for preaching as a type of play and interplay in the movement between ancient and contemporary worlds, while retaining both life and scripture as sacred texts in preaching. Preaching as an outsider necessitates one being astute in knowing when and how to use caution or take liberties in interpretive decisions.

Chapter 5 attends to how preaching within a framework of ingenuity relies on a communally-assertive preaching authority. These types of messages possess contemporary veracity, while they show forth immediate implications for the survival and thriving of a community. Such an approach to shaping a message for preaching disrupts false binaries between authoritative and communal approaches to preaching.

chapter 1

Sermons undergirded with contemporary veracity and authority assume God is near and present in the everyday world. They depend on the preacher's ability to recast the story of faith. Sacred storytelling through preaching is the focus of chapter 6, and requires the nuanced grounding of faith claims in their ordinary implications for both the individual and the community as they exist in the wider world.

In the final chapter, I share the ways in which particularity shapes every preaching ministry. And in turn, learning from a variety of preaching ministries is the only way preachers cultivate the wisdom and ingenuity necessary for preaching in their specific context.

"A POWERFUL REMINDER TO KEEP FIGHTING AND KEEP THE FAITH."

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SACRED RESISTANCE

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND DISSENT

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SACRED RESISTANCE

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A Practical Guide
to Christian Witness and Dissent

Ginger Gaines-Cirelli

 Abingdon Press™
Nashville

SACRED RESISTANCE:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND DISSENT

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Chapter 1

SACRED RESISTANCE: CONTOURS AND COMMITMENTS

Sacred resistance is a way of being and acting in the world that is engaged with and for the world God loves.

Sacred resistance is fueled and guided by a loving God who is the source and sustainer of all life, a God who is always working for good in the world, a God who has been revealed as God-with-us, a God who invites us to share the divine life of creative, mending, saving love.

Sacred resistance is anything—any word, deed, or stance—that actively counters the forces of hatred, cruelty, selfishness, greed, dehumanization, desolation, and disintegration in God’s beloved world.

Sacred resistance is nonviolent and seeks the common good.

Sacred resistance “reads the signs of the times” through the lens of biblically and relationally grounded faith to discern how to be actively engaged with the world and to be vigilant against whatever threatens the world’s life.¹

Sacred resistance takes shape in personal attitudes and in communal protest, in spiritual practices and in political advocacy, in how we spend our time and for whom we will risk our safety.

Sacred resistance will look different in different contexts because its practitioners will engage the specific situation or reality present at any given time.

Sacred resistance is the domain of no one human sect, faction, party, race, class, or even creed but is primarily the domain of a radically free God who calls us to cross boundaries to share and care for life with and for others.

Sacred resistance is what is needed for the living of these days. And “these days” are whatever days we find ourselves living.

Light and Love

“You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your [God] who is in heaven.” (Matt 5:14-16)

We are light in the world, called to be a shining reflection of the God in whose image we are created. In days when violence and injustice threaten to overwhelm, when the onslaught of terror and grief leaves scant room in our newsfeed for anything else, when we are painfully aware of our smallness and how much we don’t know, when what we learn reveals seemingly insurmountable challenges stretching out before us, it is easy to feel that our little light makes little difference. We might experience the flame of our faith, hope, and even love grow weak and dim, challenged as it is by so deep a shadow. This is understandable. Negative voices and energies easily hitch a ride on the shadows of grief, rage, injury, vulnerability, and disappointment.

But in the midst of the shadow, the words of Jesus resound all the more: “You are the light of the world!” *Heeding these words of Jesus is an act of sacred resistance.* In so doing, you resist the temptation to give in to cynicism or to self-protective wall-building or to violent retaliation. To claim that you are light in the world is to receive the good news that you are made to shine, that you have a place and a purpose in the world and for the world, and that your light matters. It is an affirmation that you are a beloved part of God’s family, enfolded into God’s life and activity. Jesus himself is described as the light of the world, his life “the light for all people” (John 1:4). We are recipients of that light. We are made in the image of Christ. We are to be light for others in the way Christ is a light for others.

Now if that all seems a bit too lofty for a life like yours, then your first exercise in sacred resistance is to take Isaiah 43:1-7 into your daily prayer for at least a week (a month would be even better). Hear these words as God’s voice speaking *directly to you*. Listen for what God wants to say to you. Then after at least a week with Isaiah, do the same with Matthew 5:14-16. Hear the voice of Christ speaking these words to you. If you are so led, listen to what God wants to say to you in the longer passage contained in Matthew 5:1-16.

Among the personal messages you will receive, this part of the text is clear: you are precious, beloved, formed and made by God for glory. You are created to share in the life and light of Christ!

There will be those who will reject the notion that sacred resistance begins in prayer or in one person’s journey to acknowledge and accept the love of God. What do those things have to do with the heart-rending realities of brutality, hatred, and injustice in our communities and world? What possible difference do they make?

I suggest that sacred resistance begins in the heart of God. It is, in fact, God’s consistent stance toward the world. Out of an overflowing love desiring to be shared, God creates the world and all that is. Out of love, God seeks relationship with humankind. Out of love,

God provides everything we need to live in peace, joy, and wholeness. And when we, God's children, turn away and our love fails, God's love remains steadfast. *God resists abandoning us!*

God could have chosen to let us go. Across the ages, God's prophets are rejected, ignored, or killed. God's people make promise after promise, only to get distracted and wander off into the emptiness of self-made idols and the conflict inevitably resulting as the fruit of injustice. God loves us and wants to be close to us. We pay lip service to God and want to be close to our stuff. It's an old story that gets repeated through the ages. But the twist in the tale every time? God consistently resists leaving us alone! God chooses to stay with us, to never give up on us, to keep calling us to live into the image that is our birthright. God loves us with an everlasting, stubborn love. That love is the model and the fuel for sacred resistance.

It is one thing to believe that God loves the world. It is quite another to allow God's love to penetrate our own heart and life such that it grounds our thoughts, perceptions, and actions.

When you are able to stay connected to the love of God who holds you, calls you by name, forgives you, and empowers you to shine, you will be better equipped to act in the world with sacred resistance. Because you will know firsthand what sacred resistance is really about: it's about love, love that looks upon each person with a desire for their well-being, love that looks upon human community with a desire for healing and peace with justice, love that looks into all creation with a desire for mending and reverence, love that is compassionate and merciful, love that is stubborn and sacrificial. This is how God loves the world. This is how God loves you. This is how God created you to love.

"You are the light of the world," Jesus says. As long as you take those words seriously, even when you feel dimmed by weariness and worn down with grief, God's love will continue to shine, lighting the

way not only for you to keep going but also for others to see you and to follow.

With Others

Twitter is a fascinating phenomenon on the social media landscape. It's amazing how much can be communicated in such a limited number of characters. Perhaps it is the terse nature of the medium that creates opportunity for the pointed and piercing attacks between people that so often appear on my Twitter feed. My strategy has been to pick up news and follow the general trend of social energy on that platform but to avoid getting into "conversations" on Twitter. The few times I broke that rule, it didn't end well. However, one exchange was interesting. This is how it went:

Me: Jesus didn't come 2 disturb the peace of a peaceful world. He came 2 disturb the injustice of an unjust world. #Sanctuary #Black-LivesMatter

Unknown Tweeter: Jesus should really stop the violence.

Me: That's our part of the deal. As Teresa of Avila says: Christ has no body now but yours. . .

Unknown Tweeter: Can one man tackle the problems of this cruel and evil world?

Me: No. It's the work of the whole body—every member of the human family. Not all accept that work. But we who long 4 love & justice do our part.

Unknown Tweeter: Touché

You are the light of the world. I am the light of the world. All are created to be light, to embody love in action. As the brief Twitter exchange above reveals, there is a strong tendency these days to perceive everything through the lens of the individual (can *one person* tackle all the problems?). But our faith is clear: we do not shine alone.

Sacred resistance is about relationship from start to finish. It begins in relationship with God and is given shape through God's love for each one of us. It is lived out most fully in relationship with and for others. Jesus has no body on earth but the body of people who seek to live according to God's wisdom and way, who seek to make God's love incarnate. The sixteenth-century nun and mystic Teresa of Avila, wrote:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

This doesn't mean that each of us is to do all the work of Christ on our own. The "yours" of which Teresa speaks is a collective. The body of Christ is not one person but is, rather, the whole people of God. When each one of us does our part, shining our light as God has guided us to do, we participate in the ongoing work of Christ in the world. We undertake the work of sacred resistance *with God and with other people*.

This is profoundly good news as we look and see the depth and breadth of suffering and injustice in this beautiful, broken world. It is not up to us to save the world! Salvation is God's work, and we participate with many others to share the divine work of mending.

In our society, folks struggle to get by—to find sufficient economic, physical, and emotional resources to care for themselves and their families. Sacred resistance is not something “piled on” to an already overburdened life but instead an invitation to participate with others in both giving and receiving support and encouragement. As theologian Douglas John Hall writes: “The importance of the corporate nature of the Christian life—the ‘body’—lies not only in its meaning for the individuals who are part of it, but in the promise that it provides for their shared work of world-mending.”²

Thanks to the window of Facebook, I have a view of friends who are not connected to a faith community. Many long for connection to others with whom to process what is happening in society or in their lives. Recently, one of those friends put out a call for people who meet together and discuss “what is going on and what we can do.” I thought to myself, “That already exists in churches and synagogues all over the city!” I invited my friend to check out what was happening at the church I serve. One of the great gifts of our faith is that we are blessed with the gift of community, a community that can not only share the work but also expand our perspective through real, honest relationships—and all undergirded by the love and grace of God.

What Others Are We With?

As members of the body of Christ, we are given eyes to see that there really is no “us and them.” There is only “we.” Jesus came to save not one part of the world but the whole world. The life together into which Christ calls us is not a vision of an exclusive, separatist club. Rather, the church is a living example and practice ground for how radically diverse humans can journey together in mutual care and friendship as we share God’s life of creative, mending, saving love.

The church is *with* its members and with those all around them in their local community and world. Those who seek to follow Jesus and those of other creeds and cultures are “in this thing together.” And if the church is truly trying to follow Jesus, we/it will understand that God’s creative, mending, saving love is extended to the whole world. In this context, it makes sense that those in the human family who are struggling or experiencing pain or injustice will receive particular attention and care. Even a cursory review of the gospel accounts of Jesus’s life reveals that he spent most of his energy in the margins, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, confronting injustice, restoring life and dignity to those for whom these gifts had been denied.

Even so, I have had conversations with church folks who are uncomfortable with the idea that God has a “preferential option for the poor.” They feel such a statement is exclusive and limits God’s care. I’ve heard things like, “Don’t the rich need God’s love and grace, too?” This reaction is akin to the “all lives matter” response to the Black Lives Matter movement. The common factor here is the notion that a focused commitment to one group will diminish the dignity, worth, or care assigned to those outside that group. Such a perspective betrays the belief that there is a limited supply of dignity, worth, or care available. This is not true. God’s love and grace are eternal and unlimited. There is more than enough to go around. There is not a limited supply of human dignity or freedom. But the truth is that some people and groups have been denied what is abundantly available out of greed, fear, control, hatred, ignorance, complacency, selfishness, rationalization, and all other manner of human sin.

A perspective that rejects the practice of an intentional and focused solidarity with the poor and oppressed can only thrive in a radically dis-integrated context—that is, a context in which our fundamental interdependence is ignored or denied. Such a perspective is maintained at our peril. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us again and again, we are part of one family, intricately

connected and ultimately responsible for what happens to one another. God made the world this way, made *us* this way, so that until you are whole, I cannot be whole, and vice versa.

This biblically grounded perspective (e.g., 1 Cor 12) is critically important for the work of sacred resistance. At one and the same time, it affirms the wholeness of the human family and acknowledges that the experience of one affects the lives of all. In his first letter to the Corinthian churches, Paul described life together saying, “Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts. . . . If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it” (1 Cor 12:12, 26a). I’ll never forget the moment many years ago when the deep truth of these words pierced my heart. The preacher said simply, “The body of Christ has AIDS.” It struck me as never before: *my body* has AIDS because the bodies of others suffer from this disease. What affects one, affects all. This brings another layer of meaning to that central law to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

As followers of Jesus, we turn toward the places of pain and suffering because that is what Jesus did and because it is the way of lovingly mending the broken creation of which we are a part. It is the truly human thing to do. Even as we focus our attention on the causes of pain and injustice, take responsibility for our own part in those causes, and seek to care for and be in solidarity with those who suffer, our faith always reminds us that God’s saving love is for the whole world. Our repentance in word and deed and our solidarity with the poor and oppressed not only serve to alleviate the suffering of our siblings but also serve the good of all. Our call is to work for the *common* good.

Keeping the Good “Common”

At the most basic level, any impulse or decision to focus on the needs or suffering of others is a form of sacred resistance. Our

culture, on the one hand, wants us to believe the universe revolves around our own feelings, needs, or comfort. God, on the other hand, creates and calls us to live with and for *others*, to love our neighbors as ourselves. My guess is that most readers of this book are already committed to the work of solidarity and service. Therefore, the task then becomes trying to engage that work faithfully.

One challenge in our current climate is that with so many groups crying out for long-denied justice, it becomes difficult to keep “the common good” in view. A focus on the common good is not a ploy to deny or minimize the specific, urgent human crises that call for attention. It is, rather, to hold those crises in proper perspective. There seems to be a burgeoning emphasis on discrete “social issues” or specific human “rights” instead of consistent emphasis on a more holistic vision of a *common* good. Add to that the nature of our sound-bite culture with its tendency to boil things down to their lowest common denominator, and the stage is well set for polarized “for” or “against” ways of thinking even among those seeking to forward the cause of justice.

The primary struggle is not between one group or another, but it is a struggle to achieve what is good for *all*, namely, the Judeo-Christian prophetic vision of a world committed to peace with justice and guided by love of God and love of neighbor.

Such a holistic vision is critically important in order to keep from falling into the same “us versus them” dynamics we ostensibly want to break down through acts of sacred resistance. When the perception is that one group’s need for justice is more important than another group’s need for justice, we’ve begun to tear rather than mend. When distinct advocacy groups fighting for support and resources begin to lose sight of the larger vision of a truly *common* good, the cause of justice is undermined. When the “enemy” becomes a stereotype, a faceless “other” upon whom it is easy to apply labels like *monster* or *satan*, it is time to pause and recalibrate. What

affects one, affects all. The common good can get lost in the struggle between competing needs, competing goods, competing sufferings. The common good can also get trampled as we charge ahead seeking to do what is right.

Sometimes, there are events in our nation or world that rightly draw attention to one place or issue. In those moments, people of faith and conscience will do all they can to respond. But most days, in a land as large and diverse as the United States, there are multiple needs for healing and justice all equally urgent and all occurring at the same time. A later chapter will take up the issue of how to discern where to put our energy when there are so many places and people calling for response. The point I want to make here, however, is simply this: there is no part of the creation that God values above another. God loves the whole world and is always working to bring healing and wholeness into lives, communities, and creation. For followers of Jesus, that is the larger vision that holds and guides our work of a truly “sacred” resistance.

If this point seems obvious within a Christian context, it is likely not obvious as a Christian value to those outside the church. What is most obvious in the public square is that Christian leaders focus on specific issues and particular groups of people with judgment, ignore other issues and groups that merit attention and care, and attack one another within the confines of denominational and ecumenical bounds. The work of sacred resistance will seek both to acknowledge this tendency and to be part of its remedy.

Gerald C. Liu & Khalia J. Williams

Foreword by Lauren Winner

A WORSHIP WORKBOOK

A Practical Guide for Extraordinary Liturgy



A WORSHIP
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**A WORSHIP
WORKBOOK**

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EXTRAORDINARY LITURGY

 **Abingdon Press™**

Nashville

**A WORSHIP WORKBOOK:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EXTRAORDINARY LITURGY**

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Part One

WIDENING OUR WORSHIP
IMAGINATION

WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD WORSHIP?

If you are reading this workbook, you probably have a sense for what good worship is. Maybe it is mostly a sense, because you have not put words toward it. Perhaps this is because you have grown up going to church, and the transition to planning and implementing good worship intentionally as a worship leader is trickier than you thought. Maybe you have not yet experienced good worship exactly as you intuit or imagine. Maybe you have worshipped like a liturgical nomad so far, searching for the right ritual fit and landing in some congregations that came close or that may have been just what you were looking for, only to find yourself back on the search for various reasons—moving for school, a job, a partner, a scandal, a disagreement, a wound, or just because. Maybe you have participated in good worship. Yet you are not quite sure how to set conditions for it on a consistent basis. Maybe Christianity is new to you. Or maybe you have been running from a call that has finally caught up with you. Maybe you have been so inspired or so underwhelmed that you know you can offer good worship, and that you can do better. Maybe you are a seasoned leader of worship interested in expanding your expertise. Either way, this book is one of many arrows that you'll collect in your quiver so you can aim for liturgical excellence.

We enter this chapter assuming that you have already been thinking about preaching, and have established a sense for what good worship looks, feels, and sounds like. We want to begin with a chapter that helps worship leaders ponder over what makes for effective worship, and crystallize what weakens worship so that you can avoid those pitfalls. The questions and exercises in this chapter are intended to help you identify what makes worship sing, so you know what “notes” generate the most theological impact. In other words, what are the key elements in worship that make for the most impressive theological engagement? Is it close alignment with a biblical text or theme? Is it professionalism in the choir or poise among the readers and liturgists? Is it decorum or simplicity? Is it freedom or form? Is it a range of characteristics and more? By complement, when worship leaders zero in on what makes worship wither as well and put that into words, they can pay better attention to what convolutes or undermines creating conditions for holy encounter. Do we need to check our denominational or personal hubris regarding what is liturgically correct? Do we need to ensure that those leading worship are not either culturally or generationally homogenous, or both? Do we need to ask if good worship is limited only to what can happen within a sanctuary? Or are there possibilities in the public sphere and the World Wide Web? When we name what we think

makes for meaningful and underwhelming worship, then we have starting points for sketching clearer designs of worship that glorify God and celebrate the love of God and neighbor.

Importantly, the chapter here puts the onus on criteria generated by you. We would be remiss to offer *A Worship Workbook* without creating space within it for what *you* think and know about emboldening Christian worship. Whether you are a veteran of leading worship or a newbie, this chapter will help each kind of reader draw out into words a trove of liturgical wisdom.

Questions and Exercises

1. Think of one of the most meaningful experiences of worship that you have had. It may have been a special service or an ordinary one in your local church; an occasion of worship as a visitor in a congregation; a time of worship during a retreat, concert, conference; or another kind of event. It may have occurred in solitude, in nature, or during a moment of awe or personal illumination not at all affiliated with Christianity in any way. In a few sentences, reflect upon why that experience of worship was so meaningful to you. What made it that way? Try to recall and consider different dimensions including but not limited to the order of worship, prayers, rituals, space, bodily kinesthetics, smells, bells, and use of the arts. Try to be as detailed as possible.

2. Think of the most underwhelming experiences of worship that you have had. In a sentence or two, reflect upon why that experience of worship was so disappointing. What made it that way? Was it poorly executed? Was it exclusive or socially insensitive? Try to recall and consider different dimensions including but not limited to the order of worship, prayers, rituals, space, bodily kinesthetics, smells, bells, and use of the arts. Try to be as detailed as possible.

3. Complete the following sentences:

I believe worship is most efficacious when . . .

I believe worship is most negligent when . . .

I believe worship is “lukewarm” or “so-so” when . . .

Individual and Small Group Reflection and Discussion

After you have answered the above questions individually, share them with colleagues in person, over the phone, or online, and ask them how they might answer. If you are using the workbook in a class setting, gather into groups in real time or in a group thread or video chat, and share your answers with one another.

After sharing answers to the first set of questions, you may want to distill your discussion into a list of key facets of meaningful worship.

1. What are the main ingredients of meaningful worship? Try to be as concise as possible here.
2. Based upon the list created from question 1 and your answers above, what kind of rubric could you create, what kind of criteria could you name, to check to see if your worship leading has the hallmarks of good worship?

Follow Up: What Students Have to Say

At the start of each year, I (Khalia) assemble a team of sixteen students to lead the worship life at Candler School of Theology for the academic year. These students are an intentionally diverse group that brings together graduate students from different denominational affiliations, racial/ethnic backgrounds, geographic regions, ages, and theological sensitivities. In our first meeting, which is generally focused on orientation and training, these students are asked, “What is good worship for you?” I use this question as a way to help students hear the diverse responses in the room, and it is an eye-opening experience for many. In addition, I use this same question when leading workshops within congregations and pastoral leaders on embodied worship. Serving as an icebreaker, the participants are broken into small groups to think through their understanding of “good worship” and are then asked to describe what they heard, and where there were similarities and differences. Below is an abbreviated list developed from the last three years of engaging this exercise with the Candler School of Theology worship students, and the church workshops.

Students’ Responses to the Question, What Is Good Worship for You?

1. Music

Music that is centering and reflective.
Energetic and exciting sound.

Invites the community to sing together. There is nothing more beautiful than hearing the people around you singing in harmony with you.

Traditional music—hymns that have a history, that make me think about my grandmother.

Songs that soothe the soul.

Good contemporary music and anthems that make me want to sing.

Moments of silence.

Theologically accurate music.

Intentional music.

Blend of sound that includes favorite songs of the church and new songs to learn.

Variety of genres to connect with everyone who is gathered.

2. Congregational Engagement

Worship that leads the congregation into a deeper connection with God.

Worship that is shaped around community.

Invites participation of people in the pews.

Moves through different ways of being active in the experience—I can move, I can be silent, I can sing, I can pray.

Worship that is put together with the members in mind. It is apparent when the worship leaders know their audience and connect with them.

A celebration! We come together to celebrate God.

Offers opportunities for the people to be heard—testimony, scripture reading, or any way that lets more than the pastor be heard.

Times for lament as a church family—litanies, prayers, silence. Being able to lament in a community has been transformative.

Communal rituals beyond Communion and baptism.

Connection to the doctrine and foundation of the church through different practices (prayers, Communion liturgies, and seasonal celebrations).

3. Incites Action beyond the Moment

Makes me think about the way I exist in the world.

Gives me something to carry with me through the week; things to think about in living out my faith.

Engages relevant issues and makes the congregation aware of injustices in the world and our role to fight against them.

Not just a “feel-good” moment, but a time when the church comes together and is motivated to be God’s hands and feet in the world.

Inspires me to be better and do better, because that is what God requires of me.

Worshipping outside of the sanctuary in the community.

Justice-centered worship; not afraid to address social issues in a worshipful way.

4. Worship Environment

The place where I want to go to be with God and with others. It is different from my personal devotion.

Welcoming and hospitable from the parking lot to the sanctuary.

Visually appealing space—connects with the season of the church, even in the small ways, and is a nice environment.

Mindfulness of all who are in the building, and those who are online. Making this clear throughout the service.

Invitational environment.

Two separate services that offer two different styles of worship—traditional and contemporary.

Good use of technology.

Opportunities for fellowship.

A space created for the community.

5. Dynamic Worship Leaders

Having people lead worship who can read the room and know where to take the service, and who are in tune with how the Holy Spirit is moving and can flow.

A good preacher is key for good worship. That is the main part of the service that many people show up for, so the preaching has to be good.

Leaders who liturgically heighten the service through their presence and presentation.

Pleasant people in the pulpit—smiles, warm personality, connectable.

Creative and diverse leaders.

Seamlessly weaves together what is important to the community with what God is doing in the moment.