

Stanley Hauerwas. *A Cross-Shattered Church: Proclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009. 160 pages. \$17.99.

As I sit with new groups of students embarking on the life journey of preacher, I often find that the most difficult mantle with which they wrestle is that of theologian. They have no difficulty understanding that biblical scholarship is an important dimension of preaching. Nor are they uncomfortable with thinking of themselves as pastors or teachers. But doing theology? That is for scholars not preachers.

Stanley Hauerwas would argue that it is not only difficult to preachers to do theology, it is difficult for theologians to do theology. “We know better what God is not than we know what God is” (11). Nevertheless, we, preachers and theologians, continue to try to understand and to speak about the God who has called us into being. God is not dead, nor is preaching.

Hauerwas notes that, until recently, sermons were the place that theology was done. I must confess – I turn more often to the sermons of Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Tillich than I do to their theological treatises. We should be grateful, therefore, that one of the significant theologians of the late 20th and early 21st century has seen the need to, once again, share with us a collection of sermons. His is a voice and a challenge to preach theology that continues to be needed.

Perhaps as important as the sermons that he offers is the introduction to the volume in which Hauerwas issues the call for theologically grounded preaching. He argues that “the recovery of the sermon as the context for theological reflection is crucial if Christians are to negotiate the world in which we find ourselves” (12). For a multiplicity of reasons we have “lost our confidence in the language of faith” (18). But even more importantly, he observes, too many preachers are not even sure that God will show up in their preaching; they have a belief “in the real absence” (18).

Hauerwas does expect God to show up. And he believes that those sitting in the pews believe that as well. To be a faithful servant of the word, he offers for our reflection seventeen sermons divided into four theological categories: seeing, saying, living, and events.

The communities for whom these sermons were written range from the chapel of Duke Divinity school, to meetings he attended, to baptisms, weddings, and the parish where he now attends. What is consistent throughout these sermons is Hauerwas’s dedication to proclaiming the Good News in ways that his listeners “develop imaginative skills to help us see the world as judged and redeemed by Christ” (16).

But perhaps the most thoughtful and delightful contribution of the entire book comes at the end in an Appendix. Would you like to make sense of Stanley Hauerwas without having to buy “Hauerwas for Dummies”? Then you will enjoy reading, “Connecting Some of the Dots, or An Attempt to Understand Myself.”

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