

John Tucker, ed. *Text Messages: Preaching God's Word in a Smartphone World*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017. 242 pages. \$32.

The first thing you need to know about this collection of essays on preaching is that its title is deceiving. This is not predominately a conversation about new tips and tricks for preaching in a “smartphone world.” If you were looking for homileticians to engage the smartphone world in novel ways of preaching, look elsewhere.

Nonetheless, *Text Messages* is an interesting collection of essays on many facets of preaching and the preaching life. It emerged mostly from papers presented at a conference hosted by Carey School of Preaching at Carey Baptist College in Auckland, New Zealand. Tucker organized the chapters around Paul Windsor's essay “What is Preaching?” Preaching emerges from five players: Text (Part I), Society (Part II), Listener (Part III), Preacher (Part IV), and Christ (Part V).

In the field of homiletics, many essays are in the family tree of post-liberal theories and the importance of placing the text in center stage in order for preaching to be revived. One can very much hear the concern of Charles Campbell's “new directions for homiletics” in *Preaching Jesus* emerge in our era of smartphone technologies and sound byte proclamation. This is especially the voice of the editor, John Tucker, whose essays (almost) bookend the collection. Tucker sets the context of the book as a moment of “crisis in preaching” (Tucker, xvi). This crisis is caused by the social media technologies, notably the abundance of “noise” these platforms create (202). Geoff New names one related crisis in the Internet. With scriptures being “immediately and conveniently” on screens rather than heard, we now have dulled our capacity to hear the Living Word speak to us (49). Should you have a hard copy of this book in hand, you see the crisis firsthand on the front cover: we have allowed our smartphones to have a higher place in our lives than the printed scripture.

Tucker and others do note co-conspirators to preaching's crisis besides technology per se, including the challenge of busyness in the church today. Talking with preachers, Tucker observed that many feel preaching has been pushed to the margins of their ministry in order for other responsibilities to take center stage. The image for the pastor becomes that of “CEO” (202). Authors also name the push to celebrity style preaching wherein delivery trumps theological content.

Some of the most compelling essays in the collection center on what practices are necessary for longevity as a preacher. These authors offer practices to counter the busyness and distraction put onto preachers today. Contributors Lynne M. Baab and Philip Halstead offer concrete postures and practices for preachers to reclaim Sabbath and the capacity to listen for God rather than rushing to find a word to speak into the noise that surrounds us.

Will Willimon closes out the collection with an essay on the Holy Spirit's role in preaching (interestingly submerged in the subheading of Christ rather than its own category). While the essays begin predominately in the world of text, Willimon ultimately reminds us of the disruptive nature of the Holy Spirit who is ultimately in control of our preaching (or should be). “I would like to testify to a spiritual gift that Paul fails to mention in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10,” Willimon asserts, “perhaps because it was so obvious to him personally—*disruption*” (233).

While many contributors highlighted the age of distraction in which we live, less was said about this great disruption taking place in this time of technological innovation—including in the church—and the possibilities for preaching and church organization waiting to emerge from the chaos the church seems to swim in. One exception is Marc Radar's essay “Looking

Backward to Look Forward.” Closing his very brief sketch of the history of preaching and how culture impacts the practice, Radar concludes: “I am convinced that the history books of the future will include descriptions of preachers from the mid-twenty-first century whose preaching was effective because it was typical of the times and places they ministered” (99). Darrell W. Johnson names this reality as well in his essay “The Transforming Power of Text.” “Regardless of the form of communication, Jesus Christ will make sure people hear, receive and be fed by his word” (22). And since Johnson, Rader, and others do not lift up examples of such preachers and practices in this collection, the lingering question planted for the reader is not only “Will we join them?” (99) but how can we join them?

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