

Lisa L. Thompson. *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018. 193 pages. \$29.99

Lisa L. Thompson, soon to be Associate Professor and Cornelius Vanderbilt Chancellor Faculty Fellow of Black Homiletics and Liturgics at Vanderbilt Divinity School, presents a thought-provoking book titled, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider*. In this book, Thompson describes the reality that the bodies, personhood, and lived experiences of black preaching women have mostly been neglected, being outsiders within our guild and in black faith communities. She lifts up the preaching voices of black women who continue to navigate the disheartening reality between the external expectations of listening communities and traditions and their own personhood, and she invites readers to learn from their creative preaching practice (6). In other words, Thompson argues, illuminating the full personhood of these black-preaching-women will bring fresh air from the outside or margin that can reshape our view and practice of preaching.

Thompson's first two chapters lay the foundation for a concept of *ingenuity* for the theology and practice of preaching as an outsider. The rest of the chapters attend to the shape of sermon development and design, built upon the concept of ingenuity, in engagement with actual sermons of black-preaching-women.

In chapters 1 and 2, Thompson laments that black women, although uniquely shaped by the intersection of race, class, sexuality, gender, and social location, remain(ed) outsiders within the preaching ministry, especially under male-centered dynamics in communities of faith (13). In that context, the preaching practice of black women—both by force and by choice—becomes unimaginative, replicating against their real, female bodies the bodily practice and imitation of the already-established images and practices of black male preaching. In a way, every preacher stands in conversation with her community and a tradition beyond herself, competing with the established images of black preaching and negotiating a space for her voice in the various contexts of ministry (32). What is needed in this situation is for black-preaching-women to intentionally disrupt the situation by utilizing, as Michel de Certeau suggests, the “tactical use” of traditional practice and expectations of black preaching with creativity and ingenuity in order for preachers to find their own voices. Thompson asserts that preaching is ultimately to make a way to encounter the sacred-in-breaking (the word of God), which not only affirms but also pushes and expands communal beliefs, experiences, and practices of preaching and proclamation for the sake of God's justice in the community and world (18-19, 26).

Chapters 3 through 6 are each framed by four major sections: hearers' expectations of preaching, the personhood of black women, black women's creative use of those expectations for the practice of preaching, and practical advice for sermon development. Chapter 3 explores how everyday life and the lived experiences of the community (including black women) can be used as a resource in preaching by recovering invisible narratives (the unfamiliar), and then weaving them with familiar narratives for the sake of the transformation of the community (39-40).

In chapter 4, drawing on the idea that both scripture and lived experience are sacred texts in preaching, Thompson argues that preaching should be an interplay and play between the ancient world and contemporary world, creating points of identification for shared encounter and meaning of texts (80-87). In other words, scripture and lived experience of listeners are mutually influential in the negotiating process of interpretation within the community.

Chapter 5 illuminates how preaching as an outsider can bring about the shared experience of God as a “very present truth” for life abundant (survival and thriving) in the community here

and now, by adopting a communally-assertive mode (pulse or movement) of preaching, which is characterized by confident utterances, immediate relevancy, and buildup (layering one's claim in small increments at a time) (122). Thompson further asserts that this mode disrupts false dichotomies between authoritarian and communal understandings of preaching by identifying the message, imagining the possibilities, and creating mutual experiences.

Chapter 6 asserts that the preacher's task is to make a way for the sacred-in-breaking of God as a very present help, and to develop and expand the working faith claims of the community in a nuanced way. Based on the notion that life with God, life with others, and the lives of the people of faith are interconnected, Thompson avers that the preacher should make explicit links between the overarching faith-story, the everyday, and an awareness of God on personal and communal levels through preaching (160).

While this book is to be applauded in many ways, I want to specifically highlight two contributions. First, this brilliant book, deeply contextual and trans-contextual in its entirety, shows how marginalized voices and experiences, especially of black-preaching-women, can contribute to the enhancement of our homiletical, practical-theological understanding of preaching and proclamation on the personal, communal, and theological level. Second, Thompson's practical suggestions about how the preacher as an outsider should navigate the various and complex power dynamics within the community is extremely helpful, not only for black-preaching-women but for any preachers who find themselves on the margins in our postmodern context.

However, there are also some minor issues to be mentioned. First, it is not clear if Thompson's revisionist and problem-solving approach developed for the communal context of those marginalized preachers can transform the power structure deeply embedded within the communities. Second, some homileticians may wonder if Thompson's suggestions, based on the logic of identity, truly include all marginalized voices within the community beyond those called to preaching ministry, thus failing to give other voices autonomy and agency for the sake of their vibrant subjectivity.

Despite these issues, I highly recommend this book for all preachers who might find themselves in a space of marginalization within and beyond the faith community. Additionally, Thompson's book is an excellent guide for many homileticians and scholars who desire to learn how to negotiate and navigate power differentials with ingenuity for the task of preaching.

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