

Joni S. Sancken. *Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2019. 122 pages. \$15.20.

Words That Heal by Joni Sancken is the fifth volume in the Artistry of Preaching Series, edited by Paul Scott Wilson. This book is a practical but insightful resource to equip preachers to speak the gospel of healing to congregants who bear wounds caused by past personal and collective traumatic events. In this volume, Sancken seeks a trauma-sensitive preaching model that can foster healing from trauma.

First, Sancken defines trauma as “circumstances in which a person survives a life-threatening experience or loses a loved one suddenly, where one’s ability to process experience is surpassed by the breadth or depth of the experience itself” (xiii). Further, she renames them “soul wounds,” referring to unattended and unhealed pain that lingers within those who survive traumatic events and other wounding experiences (xiii–xiv, 2). Based on this understanding, throughout four chapters she develops a strategy for trauma-aware preaching.

Chapter 1 offers the theoretical groundwork for trauma-informed preaching, providing theories associated with trauma studies to enhance preachers’ trauma awareness. Sancken explains trauma’s causes and effects: traumatic events inscribe ongoing and unhealed soul wounds in the whole body of survivors, which can trigger physical, mental, emotional, and relational responses, as well as spiritual questions to God. Asserting the role of the church for healing trauma, she discusses how therapeutic approaches, mainly based on works by Kaethe Weingarten and Deborah Hunsinger, and theological frameworks, such as Andrew Park’s theology of *han* (20–21) and Shelly Rambo’s theology of remaining (22–24), could help preachers address the wounds of those who bear trauma.

Chapter 2, based on Sancken’s conviction that the Bible has the potential to bring trauma awareness and healing into the sermon, develops a trauma-informed exegesis by presenting five interpretive tools that help preachers read the Bible through the lenses of trauma and resilience. Using these interpretive tools, preachers can find and use biblical language to name the pain of traumatic experiences today, make sense of its causes and effects by assigning blame to God and self, and expect that the scriptural promises of God’s healing will be fulfilled in the agonized world by recounting biblical stories typologically, particularly the redemptive story of the cross and the resurrection.

Taking sexual abuse in the church as an example, chapter 3 addresses the church’s role in causing or deepening traumatic wounds and suggests how to approach trauma-sensitive preaching that can foster healing. Sancken recognizes the resistance to addressing wounds in the church and describes the dynamics between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, which work to protect the institutional church and, in return, to silence victims and disrupt healing. She then presents practical suggestions for preaching that enable the voices of the trauma survivors to be heard without retraumatizing them or silencing their voices. It begins with listening to the survivors, hearing the confessions and apologies of the church for its failure to protect them, and speaking for the restoration of justice.

Finally, chapter 4 discusses how preaching can lead hearers to a deeper experience of the gospel and facilitate congregational resilience, and offers approaches and examples of preaching that can promote healing from trauma. Sancken claims that preaching the gospel has the power to heal traumatic wounds, break the violent cycles that reproduce trauma, and nurture resilient faith that can help wounded people embrace life again. Also, she gives practical tips for trauma-aware

preaching with exemplary sermons, starting from preaching in the immediate aftermath of a wounding event to a sermon series for healing soul wounds through the Apostle's Creed.

Overall, the main virtue of this book is that it employs trauma theory to approach healing sermons in a new and accessible manner. It makes this work valuable since it is still rare to find a homiletical discussion of healing by applying trauma theory, though pastoral preaching of healing has been dealt with by many homileticians and preachers. Moreover, this book is a timely resource for preachers who struggle to speak the gospel amidst a traumatic global pandemic. I believe they can gain useful insights on how to approach the traumatic experiences of congregants and preach more effectively in the face of those situations. It would be helpful if this volume included a deeper discussion of the plot of the gospel as preachers address the process of healing from trauma. That is, Sancken could discuss further how preachers can design a sermon that moves in reflection of the healing process from trauma. The homiletical move from lamentation to celebration, which Luke Powery suggests in *Spirit Speech*, or the four pages sermon movement from trouble to grace, could be models for how to embody the healing process from trauma in the sermon.

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