

David Fleer & Dave Bland, eds. *Preaching John's Gospel: The World It Imagines*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2008. 168 pages, \$19.99.

This is the latest volume in a wonderful series of collections of essays and sermons on preaching various books and themes in the Bible. The aim is to help us move imaginatively into the world envisioned by John's Gospel.

It is not possible to describe so many essays and sermons in any substantive way in a short review. So I choose two sets of essays and sermons that serve nearly as bookends to the collection. Group 2 is headed by Gail O'Day's essay, "Friendship as the Theological Center of the Gospel of John" and group 3 by a companion essay, "The Paraclete as Friend." The foundation of both O'Day's articles are quotations from ancient authors outside the Bible who articulate a view of friendship commensurate with that expressed by Jesus in John. One quotation is from Aristotle: "It is also true the virtuous man's conduct is often guided by the interests of his friends and his country, and that he will if necessary lay down his life in their behalf. . . ." (35) Another quotation is from Plutarch: "frankness of speech (*parresia*) . . . is the language of friendship especially." (36) In Jn 15:12-17 Jesus declares that the epitome of loving (*agape*) is laying down one's life for one's friends (*philous*). *Parresia* explicitly describes Jesus' way of speaking with his disciples three times in the Gospel (11:14; 16:25, 29), and elsewhere the sense of plain speaking is present even when the word is not employed. See, for example, 15:15, where Jesus "promotes" the disciples (Fred Craddock's sermon) from being servants to being friends. O'Day, and Craddock in a succeeding sermon titled "Being a Friend of Jesus," both note how expansive this view of friendship is compared to much modern talk about friendship. It moves beyond the sentiments of the song "What a friend we have in Jesus," who helps us carry our burdens, to Jesus' invitation to us to be a friend *to him* through the exchange of frank speech that is not always easy and welcome, and to a willingness to lay down our life for him as he did for us. A crucial insight of O'Day's is this view of friendship shared by John with other ancient authors is the soteriological base of the Gospel of John, not models of vicarious suffering, ransom for sin, and categories of law. (39)

In the final essay in this volume, "Jesus' Voice in John," Tom Boomershine pleads for us to adopt a different voice for Jesus in our oral performance of the Gospel of John. It is in fact the voice of the Jesus described by Gail O'Day as the "friend" who speaks clearly and honestly and loves so passionately as to lay down his life for those with whom he is speaking. Most of us are in the grip of a tradition of reading Jesus' words in a detached, pontificating manner that puts down his listeners. It is rather like the so-called reporting on one very popular news network, where the mere tone of voice of the reporters belittles everyone with whom they disagree and seeks to alienate their viewing audience through their very tone of voice. Boomershine argues that rather than making detached pronouncements to his listeners that alienate modern listeners from anyone who would dare to disagree, Jesus speaks as the honest friend, who makes himself vulnerable in an effort to persuade his hearers. In contrast to a tone of superiority that alienates listeners from an audience with whom Jesus engaged in some level of conflict, a tone of sympathetic yet provocative, confident yet humble passion creates

sympathy between modern listeners and Jesus' audience in the Gospel. Such a tone enables us to listen to Jesus *with* and *as* Jesus' story audience, not *over against* them. Such a tone draws us into being persuaded by Jesus along with them. The tone of Jesus' voice is, in fact, the tone typical of preachers today who seek to draw modern listeners away from currently popular ways of death to God's way of life. This is the tone that comes through Paul Scott Wilson's sermon on John 10:11-18, "No Dead End in Christ." In the body of the sermon Wilson names many ways of death pursued by 21st century Americans, and names them in a way that allows us to identify with them even if we are not in the grip of them.

This account of these few contributions to this volume will, I hope, entice the reader to read and learn from the entire collection. Even the brief accounts given here are at best teasers. Both O'Day and Boomersshine have much more to say that will deepen and transform the preacher's relationship with the Jesus of the Gospel of John.

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