

Kate Bruce. *Igniting the Heart: Preaching and Imagination*. London, UK: SCM Press, 2015. 206 pages. \$27.

Kate Bruce is an ordained Anglican priest and Deputy Warden and Tutor in homiletics at Cranmore Hall in Durham, United Kingdom. *Igniting the Heart* is based on her 2013 Ph.D. thesis at Durham University. She calls for preachers to ignite faith by sparking imaginative connections with the hearer. Her focus on creativity and the sacramental nature of preaching is an invitation for preachers to honor God's Word with their best use of words and images.

Even Bruce's description of the kind of preaching she opposes is laced with sufficient imagination to improve the posture of complacent preachers. Too much preaching she says is, "poorly conceived, ill-prepared, dull, disconnected, boring, irrelevant, authoritarian, yawn-inducing, patronizing, pontificating, pointless and badly delivered" (xiii). Imaginative preaching has power to challenge and change.

She treats imagination not as a polar opposite to intellect and reason, but as a resource for reason to use that has four functions: sensory (imagistic), intuitive (seeing in new ways), affective (empathetic) and intellectual. The latter "is the willingness to notice anomalies and to risk and question the 'irrefutable' evidence of the old paradigm" (19). Imagination has a subversive role, challenging the status quo and inviting people to faith through asking, "What if the gospel accounts of the nature of God are true? Were they to be true, then what?" (19). She maintains a distinction too often lost on the subject of human creativity: God creates *ex nihilo* and humans create "out of something" (48).

Imagination in Bruce's proposal is playful and poetic. She advocates "preaching in the lyrical voice" (55–84). This consists of poetic and imagistic expression; placing old symbols in new contexts; creating new similes, analogies, metaphors; use of sensory and experiential language; attending to scriptural detail and genre; employing repetition and musicality in speech; and numerous other items she offers in chart form (61–62). These are helpful reminders and a good guide to preachers stuck in excessively rational ways of thought. Only occasionally is the advice puzzling, as with one example that employs corny conversation and assails listeners with too many questions (63–64).

Bruce devotes a chapter to the sacramental potential of preaching, that is, its ability to disclose the self-revealing light of God and thereby to reorder how listeners see the world. The linguistic and performative gifts of the preacher have no inherent revelatory power, but God nonetheless uses the preacher's imagination "to break open the scriptural word and point to the reality of the incarnate Word, who by grace breathes through the event of the sermon" (105). Bruce grounds her understanding of sacramentality in the goodness of God as revealed in Creation and Incarnation (86–93). She acknowledges that grace is more powerful than sin, yet strangely the cross, resurrection and the Spirit at Pentecost play next to no role in the articulation of her thought. This is unfortunate since for many of her target readers, her argument would be strengthened if God in Jesus Christ, in his identity as the One who died and rose to give others life, were who is communicated in the sacramental.

By way of homiletic praxis, Bruce suggests that lament and/or grace are appropriate for the sermon (104–105). She generally cites authors from many areas, yet she seems unaware of the "trouble/grace" school of homiletics, or of what various people in homiletics (as opposed to other areas) have said about imagination, or indeed of the New Homiletic as a movement that for forty years has been advocating many of the things Bruce says, for instance about the power of image and metaphor, performative language, conversational preaching, and making connections

between the Scripture and the real lives of the hearers. The New Homiletic also explored many things relevant to her topic that she does not discuss, like the importance of narrative, inductive sermons, organic form, specific varieties of sermon structure, focusing on God's action in or behind the text if grace is to be communicated, or the value of proclamation, understood as God's direct liberating speech to the people.

At times Bruce may only be doing what many people are guilty of who write about preaching, a kind of reinvention of the wheel *ex nihilo*, as it were. On the other hand, imagination for the pulpit is an essential topic that needs to be revisited. Bruce brings to it an infectious passion and energy that cannot help but ignite the heart of preachers and listeners, and encourage more engaging and dynamic sermons.

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