

Sally A. Brown and Luke A. Powery. *Ways of the Word: Learning to Preach for Your Time and Place*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. 265 pages. \$28.

Sally Brown and Luke Powery team up to produce a valuable resource to assist preachers, both the inexperienced and the experienced, in the process of strengthening their ability to preach. Their philosophy for helping preachers is not to teach them to preach but to accompany them on a journey of learning by doing. They want preachers to engage in a healthy “critical reflection” on their preaching which involves thinking more deeply about their preaching practices. Therefore, they take a more personalized approach to the learning process that enables preachers to identify those areas that need improvement and expand on their strengths. Not advocating a one-size-fits-all approach allows preachers to explore avenues of preaching that best fit their skill sets. This whole process, they maintain, is best learned in a group environment (xiii).

The authors also embrace the reality of the cultural and theological diversity of our time. They believe the diversity in theological education is a blessing rather than a burden (xv). As a preaching and teaching team they model this diversity. While representing different genders, diverse religious traditions, and different races, they both are united in the commitment to preaching and to the training of preachers.

The authors team up to write the first chapter. The following chapters are single authored. Brown writes five of them and Powery four. Unlike some co-authored books that display fragmentation from one chapter to the next, this one does not. The writing style is even throughout and each chapter builds on the previous one. Even though the chapters are single authored, the authors still interact with one another in each chapter by including blocked out comments made by the other. The end of each chapter contains two helpful resources. One resource identifies further learning strategies related to the topic of that particular chapter and the other provides a brief bibliography that offers key sources for further reading.

The book approaches preaching holistically. Preaching is embedded in its larger theological and rhetorical context. Thus the opening chapters begin with the Spirit-driven context of preaching, the importance of prayer, and the centrality of worship in the task of preaching. These theological issues occupy the first four chapters.

It is not until Chapters Five through Eight that the authors deal with the more traditional tasks and skills of preaching. Chapters Five and Six focus on the task of interpretation. They first explore the interpretive process from a broader worldview. They rely on the philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur as they speak of the back-and-forth play involved in the interpretive process between the preacher, the culture, and the congregation. Then the authors hone in more specifically on the task of interpreting Scripture and laying out the process of exegesis.

Chapter Seven provides an overview of the form of the sermon. Two general forms are described: inductive and deductive. True to their teaching philosophy, they advocate versatility. To decide whether to use a deductive or inductive form, several pertinent questions are asked. For example, what do you want the sermon to accomplish? What is the congregation used to? Does the biblical text suggest a particular form? Examples are given of how preaching a text deductively and inductively might look. Again what is refreshing is their openness to all forms for the sake of discovering what best fits the sermon, the preacher, and the congregation. Even though expository preaching is not the preferred form, they do not demean it. They do, however, acknowledge that a pitfall of many preachers is their tendency to explain too much (163). Thus

the authors encourage developing sermons around scenes rather than points which enable listeners to better experience the message (160–164).

Chapter Eight is devoted to the delivery of the sermon. Before dealing with specific delivery skills, they look at it in its theological context and explore the importance of the physical body. They affirm that, “The homiletical body is a sermonic text” (188). As they do throughout the book, the authors provide a deeper perspective on certain skills that are too often treated only on a surface level.

Chapter Nine addresses the challenges and opportunities of preaching and technology. The chapter identifies the limitations and the strengths of using technology. While acknowledging the strengths, the chapter leans more toward the limitations of using technology in the sermon. Chapter Ten concludes the book by exploring how preaching transforms listeners into living faithfully in the world. Several practical strategies are offered to help preachers assist congregants in living out their faith in the daily affairs of life. This is a valuable book for both preachers and teachers of preaching.

Dave Bland, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN