

Steven W. Smith. *Recapturing the Voice of God: Shaping Sermons like Scripture*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015. 230 pages. \$25.

Preachers from every walk of faith struggle preaching creatively. Preachers may easily be tempted to preach with the same structure every week in the pulpit, whatever style they choose. Steven Smith pursues how to effectively communicate Scripture in manners that honor the shape of the Word over the sermon structure. Smith, professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, as well as vice president for Student Services and Communications, re-envisions the art of expository preaching. True expository preaching, according to Smith, is representing what God has already said (10).

Recapturing the Voice of God is designed for preachers seeking to faithfully represent God's word behind the pulpit. It is loaded with resources that ministers may find useful for any additional study on topics in which they are interested. Smith looks at preaching by genre, which is broken down into Story (Narrative, Law, Gospels/Acts, and Parables), Poem/Wisdom (Psalms, Wisdom Literature, and Prophecy), and Letter (Epistles and Revelation). Law is added into the Story form because it is surrounded by narrative (68). He argues that the context for the giving of law is vital to the preaching of it (71). Each chapter begins with a brief look at interpretation of the genre, addressing hermeneutics. That is, however, not the point of this book; exposition and preaching is the purpose. The chapters also include a section on crafting the sermon, which is followed by a sample sermon. Tacked at the end of each chapter is a small list of reflections questions and recommended resources for preaching that specific genre. At the very end of the book is a selected bibliography, which is in fact rather extensive and sorted by genre for helpful guidance. There is also a name index, subject index, and Scripture index for easy references.

Smith represents the conservative view of Scripture and its use for preaching. That is to say, he believes all Scripture is accurate and useful (2). In addition, he believes that preachers are charged to preach truth, no matter how difficult it may be. For what is worse: The preacher who tells lies or the preacher who will not preach the truth (19)? Smith is bold, and his writing style will boldly challenge any preacher to spend time in sermon preparation truly representing the text. Smith dislikes moralistic sermons, and if a sermon can be preached without preaching Jesus, then it is not worth preaching in the church assembly (54). This relates to his fundamental belief that all sermons, no matter what text is being preached, should connect to the gospel of Jesus Christ (45). This may be one of the more controversial beliefs he has on preaching. Even though he promotes the inclusion of Christ in every sermon, his defense on this position is lacking. The strongest defense Smith gives is to use the New Testament to interpret all Old Testament texts, since the New Testament is God's own commentary on his first covenant (50). In spite of this, preachers reading this book will find ways of improving their sermon technique.

The book has a strong focus on preaching from the big picture. Micro analysis of a verse is not a favored technique, but preaching large sections in one sermon is something that Smith would find acceptable because it sees the text on the macro level. For instance, the terse approach of Minor Prophets works in favor of preaching the entire prophet's message in one sermon (174). Especially in narratives, sermons should be focused on the text, not the story (97). What he means by this is that Mark tells the Transfiguration account one way, and Luke another way; preachers should preach the text (what Mark wrote) and not the story (the Transfiguration) to best represent the voice of God. In conjunction with this, when the reader knows that a psalm is based on a story (Psalm 51 and David and Bathsheba, for instance), Smith still pushes that the

sermon focus on the text and not the story. True expository preaching is preaching the text, not what is behind the text (135).

Overall, *Recapturing the Voice of God* boldly promotes the authority of Scripture and the need to preach each style of text through a different style of sermon structure. The form should shift from genre to genre, but the heart of theology – the art of representing God’s word, remains the same. The church needs preachers who communicate God’s message as told through Scripture, and this book will prepare preachers for that task.

Caleb Dillinger, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN