

Michael P. Knowles. *Third Voice: Preaching Resurrection*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021. 263 pages. \$34.

Third Voice is a call for preachers to adopt homiletical humility with regard to the resurrection. It is a book especially useful for those who teach preaching but written for any preacher who is interested in the theology of proclamation. Rather than seeking to make the audacious claims of the empty tomb palatable to modern sensibilities, and rather than demythologizing or retreating into vague propositions about resurrection in psychological, mythological, or ecclesiological terms, Knowles challenges preachers to seek out a “third space” of cruciform knowing and preaching. He describes this kind of space as a hermeneutical pilgrimage where preacher and congregation are companions on the journey. By doing so, he attempts to avoid the authoritarian perspective of literalism while letting the authority and sovereignty of God to do new things speak for itself.

Knowles draws inspiration from a variety of quotable homileticians, philosophers, and poets, but he also writes with similarly poetic prose. He states the main problem thus: “...belief in resurrection is not a destination at which we may arrive by virtue of negotiating an appropriate material, moral, or intellectual strategy” (21). He summarizes the solution this way: “...preaching modeled on resurrection is an act of trusting speech that takes Christ and the text at their word with respect to God’s willingness and ability to raise dead hearers to life (preachers foremost among them)” (28).

I am convicted by Knowles’s assertion that preachers often feel skewered by their own disbelief. Progressives who are uncomfortable with fundamentalist interpretations of the resurrection are especially likely to shoulder the impossible burden of works-righteousness: “...rather than waiting for God, it seems much simpler to take the tasks of encouragement, inspiration, and empowerment upon ourselves” (39). Simpler and, I would add, exhausting, especially two years into a global pandemic. Knowles’ words here are both a challenge and a relief: “...since some are bold enough to admit grave doubts about the resurrection in any non-metaphorical sense, might we also have courage to concede that preaching doesn’t always work the way we tell others it should?” (41). I find this honesty refreshing and pastoral, especially for preachers who have been laboring these many months in the face of death, obstinacy, and flagging church morale.

After the introduction, the book is structured in three sections: Listening, Speaking, and Waiting. A significant amount of the “Listening” section is less about listening as such and more about hearing and attending to the insufficiency of human speech. In this section he summarizes J.L. Austin’s categories of speech acts: locutionary (intelligible propositions), illocutionary (words intended to perform a function, like apologies), and perlocutionary (the effect itself, like persuasion or inspiration). He returns to these throughout the book as he describes the way preachers should leave the perlocutionary action to the God who raises the dead. It’s also in this section that he both critiques the New Homiletic and uses it as a launching point, reframing David Buttrick’s metaphor of Adam naming the animals as an example not of the human power to create worlds with words, but of that power’s limits: it is only God who can create new life from Adam’s own flesh.

In the “Speaking” section, Knowles dives into exegeting stories of the resurrection, lifting insights from the crucifixion and resurrection accounts and using them as models for how preachers can approach the gospel message. He also incorporates insights from the Pauline epistles and postcolonial studies, attempting to rescue the “kingdom” metaphor from

triumphalistic and colonizing language while simultaneously avoiding relativism. The preacher's authority to proclaim the kingdom is a borrowed authority, and the kingdom a provisional one. Becoming citizens of the already-but-not-yet kingdom requires that hearers become homeless, exiles waiting for God to gather them into a different way of being. Knowles doesn't romanticize this perspective. He reminds the reader that only God can raise the dead to life, and that the preacher's rhetoric lacks the power to do so.

In the "Waiting" section, Knowles calls preachers to imitate the disciples on Holy Saturday. Rather than trying to preempt the resurrection power of God by raising the church from the dead with our own failing words, he invites preachers to trust in God's promises. This time in between the crucifixion and Easter, the place where God's promises await fulfillment, is a sabbath that tries our ministerial patience. Again, our unusual pandemic context makes this metaphor particularly poignant.

David Barnhart, Saint Junia United Methodist Church, Birmingham, AL