

Jeff Stanfill. *Disastrous Preaching: Preaching in the Aftermath of a Natural Environmental Disaster*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2022. 132 pages. \$23.

In a time when floods, fires, and other disasters are increasing in intensity and frequency, preachers face the question of how to preach in the midst of environmental crises. In his slim, practical volume, Jeff Stanfill offers tools for preachers to guide a congregation through the immediate and lasting impacts of a natural environmental disaster. Stanfill's writing comes from his own experience of leading his congregation through the 2016 flood of his community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He shares compellingly about his own experience of this disaster and offers a framework for how a preacher might lead their own community through a similar experience.

Stanfill's book is thoroughly pragmatic, giving the reader a three-part framework for how to approach preaching after disaster: preach the Bible, preach for the survivors, and preach faithfully. This book is a good and helpful word for preachers thrown into the travails of a natural environmental disaster. It provides practical, theologically-grounded (but not theologically-overbearing) scriptural references that he calls the "5 Biblical Disaster Events." These stories include some that are well-known, like Noah and the Flood, and some that are less familiar, like the story of Jerusalem's famine in Acts. The range of stories Stanfill includes provides different windows into faithful responses to disaster and ways that a community can make meaning in the midst of crisis.

In his section on preaching for the survivors, Stanfill is attentive to the manifold aspects of disaster response and recovery. The effects of a disaster on a church community are not only physical and spiritual. They also include the psychological, sociological, cultural, and communal impacts. A preacher needs to be able to attend to how each of these dynamics are changing in the midst of a disaster and encourage their church to support each other and the broader community as they weather the physical, spiritual, social, and other effects of disasters.

While Stanfill addresses many of the effects of natural environmental disasters on communities, his approach and analysis fall short in regard to justice issues that intersect with natural environmental disasters. So-called "natural" environmental disasters are always a combination of social, political, and meteorological crises compounded by the sociopolitical response. Too often, that response disproportionately affects black, brown, Indigenous, and low-income communities. To get to the root of disaster resilience, recovery, and response, a church must be attentive to the racial and economic conditions of its community. Disaster "resilience" for a church should be understood less as "bouncing back" and more as "bouncing forward" – growing from a disaster in order to build a just, equitable, beloved community.

The most glaring omission in *Disastrous Preaching* is any discussion of the biggest driver of natural environmental disasters: climate change. Throughout the book, Stanfill fails to mention, or even allude to, climate change as a driving force of disasters. In a time when climate change is causing natural environmental disasters to increase in intensity and frequency, it is important for preachers to be able to make the connection between a congregation's experience of a disaster and the way human action is driving climate change. Discussing natural disasters without mentioning or alluding to climate change is like telling the story of Noah without mentioning the human sin that brought on the floods. Or preaching on the Exodus plagues without mentioning Pharaoh's hardened heart. It only tells a portion of the story and leaves out the most important part – the lesson about *why* this has happened and *how* we can work to ensure it does not get worse for ourselves and other communities. To be faithful to God and our

communities requires preaching about climate change when climate disasters happen. This is not just about making a political or theological point. It is about communicating the reality of what is happening in our world so that the community is prepared if, and when, the next climate disaster strikes.

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