

Lisa L. Thompson, *Preaching the Headlines: Possibilities and Pitfalls*; Working Preacher Books, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2021. 144 pages. \$19.99.

Navigating social issues in one's preaching is sometimes a tightrope walk between saying too much or saying too little, between being "too political" or not being political enough. Preachers need guidance, tools, and models for how to connect the biblical text and their contemporary context in ways that invite conversation rather than shut it down. Lisa L. Thompson's book, *Preaching the Headlines: Possibilities and Pitfalls*, is just the book needed for this time of increasing polarization both within congregations and the communities in which they minister.

In the Introduction, Thompson asks fundamental questions that can guide preachers in their sermon preparation when addressing contemporary issues. These questions connect the anthropological and theological conundrums that often underlie hot topics: "What does it mean to be human? How do we live with integrity? How ought we interact with others, especially those who are different from us? And perhaps most importantly, How do we seek God's presence, guidance, and hopes in the midst of it all?" (6).

With these questions in mind, Thompson lays out the guiding assumptions of the book in chapter 1, including the fact that preaching misses the mark when it fails to name the biblical and theological values that guide our faith lived out in community. At the same time, she is careful to note that "No border exists between pastoral care and the pursuit of justice, setting the world right-side up and calling out the chasm between the world as it is and could be" (17). In other words, it would be inaccurate to say that a sermon addressing social issues from a faith perspective is prophetic rather than pastoral because, in fact, they are bound up together. Thus, when the preacher engages their congregation (and beyond) as collaborative partners in discerning the relationship between faith and contemporary challenges, they can be guided into appropriate proclamation when they follow some basic instructions: "recall all that you know about faith, pay attention to this thing in the world, and now say something about it" (27).

In the next three chapters, Thompson takes on the topics of race, gender, sex, abilities, and other bodily matters ("Fleshy Parts," chapter 2); religion, money, and politics ("Taboo Conversations," chapter 3); and environment, land, and borders ("Struggles for Belonging," chapter 4). Each of these chapters follows the same logical progression to lead the reader first behind and beyond the headlines in order to discuss tangible matters, tensions, and risks. This is followed by exploring faith through examining tangible changes, faith talk, and possibilities for preaching. Thompson models forthright interrogation of topics such as violence against vulnerable bodies while bringing a theological framing to bear, in this case, a robust theology and Christology of the flesh. A consummate pedagogue, Thompson implicitly demonstrates how a preacher might approach social issues by deftly weaving timely news stories together with solid scriptural, ethical, and theological critique and reflection.

At the end of each of these three chapters, she offers helpful and practical questions that can inform a preacher's sermon development based on fundamental values that transcend partisan politics. The last chapter includes powerful sermon excerpts that illustrate how to apply the principles of the book. Thompson precedes each sermon with an explanation of her exegesis and contemporary application. She also includes a behind-the-scenes peek at her rationale in choosing illustrations and rhetorical techniques, as well as outcomes of the sermon.

In the homiletics classroom, an instructor could use *Preaching the Headlines* as the basis of an assignment for students to craft a sermon addressing a controversial topic in a sermon. For

the practicing preacher, one might envision an eponymous three-part sermon series taking each of the chapter themes in turn. For an even richer and robust sermon preparation experience, the preacher could invite a group of parishioners to read each of the chapters and discuss how the sermons might be shaped by the guiding questions, biblical approaches, and theological frameworks. This kind of collaboration would truly embody the spirit of Thompson's work by building bridges of understanding, trust, and mutual prophetic discernment.

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