

Kimberly R. Wagner. *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2023. 184 pages. \$28.00

Many, if not all, preachers have had to preach to a congregation reeling from the aftermath of an acute mass trauma. Whether it be the COVID-19 pandemic, a mass shooting, or a natural disaster, our communities are more and more frequently experiencing mass trauma. Preachers need to know how best to preach in light of such tragedy. *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma* is a great resource for today's preacher. This book artfully and accessibly describes the content and form of trauma-responsive and trauma-informed preaching.

In Part 1, Wagner helps the reader understand what trauma is and how it impacts communities. After surveying contemporary scholarship on the matter, Wagner puts forth her working definition of trauma: "a blow or wounding of the mind, body, and spirit/self that occurs when a destructive experience or event exceeds a person's or community's resources to process or assimilate the experience into preconceived frameworks of understanding" (24). She carefully unpacks the definition and suggests that this kind of trauma creates an experience of "narrative fracture." Trauma disrupts our overarching life-story and God story. Trauma disrupts our sense of time and coherence. In other words, we cannot make sense of trauma. This leads to fracture or separation and invites us into difficult but important theological reflection.

In Part 2, Wagner lays out a "trauma-responsive homiletic." Wagner coaches the preacher in establishing a safe space and attending to the liminal space created by narrative fracture. She describes how the preacher attends, on the one hand, to the realities of brokenness and death and, on the other hand, the realities of hope, redemption, and new life. A trauma-responsive homiletic maintains the tension between these two realities, not allowing one to collapse into the other.

Wagner outlines two different preaching forms which lend themselves to this kind of content. The first is a "snapshot" form which allows sermonic moves and ideas to be side by side without a need to construct a traditional narrative arch. This form resists chronology and coherence. The second form is called the "frayed edge" form which can follow more of the pattern of a traditional narrative but avoids "tidy resolution or redemptive ending" (89). Each of these forms is well described and exemplified through various preaching and biblical excerpts.

Part 3 concludes with a chapter on the ability of lament to generate social action and a chapter describing the impacts of prolonged trauma. This pairs nicely with the end of the first section which discusses the complexity of trauma. In conclusion, Wagner states her hope that "the kinds of trauma-responsive and trauma-aware preaching we have explored in this book will open possibilities for communities experiencing trauma to encounter God's presence, love, and life-giving work and to share that love with one another" (127).

This book is a valuable resource for practitioners of preaching and for the homiletic classroom. It stays narrow in scope, carefully defining the kind of trauma it addresses, and provides a satisfying foray into the field of trauma studies. Preachers and scholars will learn what not to say in the wake of mass trauma and be offered sound advice and practices for preaching well in times of crisis.

Allie Utley
Phillips Theological Seminary
Tulsa, OK