

Shauna Hannan and Gael Chandler. *Scripting a Sermon: Using the Wisdom of Filmmaking for Impactful Preaching*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2024. 206 pages. \$28.00.

Scripting a Sermon: Using the Wisdom of Filmmaking for Impactful Preaching is an innovative work that explores the cross-collaboration of preaching and filmmaking in mainstream culture. Shauna Hannan and Gael Chandler analyze the intersections of sermons and filmmaking by exploring development, structure, and presentation. The authors examine the art and science of artistic filmmaking in congruence and impactful preaching and provide visual images that are centralized in the text (11).

The book makes a significant contribution to discourse related to preaching and filmmaking by modeling a “cinematic literacy” converging homiletics and filmmaking for enlivening and communicating the Gospel (12). As noted in the “Introduction,” “theologians have mined films for biblical themes and filmmakers have sought out theologians as conversation partners when incorporating theological themes into their films” (15). Chapter 1 takes shape from this premise, permitting a starting point for preaching to find commonality with filmmaking: both begin with the story.

Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of collaboration in filmmaking and preaching. Each part of the film requires distinct personnel who work together to tell one succinct story. Such collaboration is at the heart of collaborative preaching. Preaching will find new meaning in pre-sermon collaboration. It involves the preacher alongside “prescreen writers and coeditors,” individuals offer story input long before the sermon is presented. This method of preparation is relatively new to me because it challenges me to invite others in my sermon development.

Chapter 3 expands on the importance of the sermon and film’s introductory moments. The authors suggest, “the beginning of a sermon sets in motion the sermon’s theme and tone, the connection to the biblical story, the relationship between preacher and hearer” (82). This chapter empowers preachers to approach the beginning of the sermon with meaningful engagement. In film, the screenwriters seek to create short, efficient exposition that places the audience into the “showing” of the film. Building sermonic suspense moves our preaching from information to a cinematic experience.

Chapter 4 provokes the preacher to envision the sermon in scene segments. This recalibrates what preachers refer to as “small segments” or blocks within a sermon to become visual sermonic scenes. Such recalibration propels listeners to visualize the sermon as a story “to run it in their heads and experience its sights, sounds, and emotions” (122-123). In so doing, sermonic embellishment arises as a potential critique of the homiletic method recommended in this book. While visual and sensory preaching elevates storytelling, it invokes a temptation for preachers to deviate from or interject into the biblical text.

Chapter 5 addresses the importance of editing in film and preaching. The authors suggest that “editing is the part of filmmaking that is closest to human thought, emotion, and experience” (167). It follows, the film takes on different dynamics of pace, speeding up and slowing down as the story expands. The audience sees it unfold as the sound, music, and shots move throughout the film. I see these preaching characteristics embodied in the African American tradition.

Chapter 6 recommends a conclusion of ecstasy, celebration, or lament. The close enacts a climax that leaves the audience in resolution or wanting more. It provokes the listener to know (cognitive), feel (emotive), or do (behavioral) something specific. Much like Frank Thomas’s *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God*, preaching helps listeners experience the assurance of grace. This specificity is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Overall, *Scripting a Sermon* is a transformative resource for those interested in the intersectionality of homiletics and filmmaking. The authors offer fresh alternatives to sermonic presentations. While it does not offer preaching methodologies, it does challenge preachers to consider innovative ways to engage listeners. They suggest, “increasing such homiletical literacy begins with the practices of preachers themselves” (18). Preaching with visual aids and sermonic scenes makes for interactive, intergenerational preaching. Therefore, this work is essential for pastors and preachers who seek to merge the imaginative and sensory worlds of film and preaching.

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