

Luke Powery, John Rottman, and Joni S. Sancken. *Getting to God: Preaching Good News in a Troubled World*. Cascade Books, 2023. 120 pages. \$21.00

Preaching the Good News of the Gospel is no simple task. Among many crucial concerns, one can be overwhelmed with the simple yet monumental question: what is the sermon's goal? In *Getting to God: Preaching Good News in a Troubled World*, Powery, Rottman, and Sancken give a poignant answer that helps to shape the inspiration, creation, and delivery of the sermon. Drawing on the work of their professor, Paul Scott Wilson, they assert that a sermon must place God's actions at the heart of the sermon. This happens by showing where God is active in the world today and creating conditions for the listeners to see God's work in their own lives (Powery, et al, 2).

With COVID-19 as a backdrop, along with the continuing political polarization in the United States, they explore the concept of "thin places." Drawn from Celtic spirituality, thin places are locations where the boundary between the earthly and the spiritual feels especially porous. These are spaces where the pretense of control is set aside so that we are vulnerable and open to God (6). Each author explores their context of "thin places" and their commitment and process of getting to God in their sermons.

Chapter 1 offers a summary and overview of the book. The authors elucidate that getting to God involves inviting or facilitating a homiletical encounter mediated by the Holy Spirit. Such an encounter fortifies and transforms the listener, launching them to faithfully live out the mission of God (2). Context matters "because at their best, preachers must work not just to understand a biblical text, but also to use that text as a potential means by which the Holy Spirit might address the lives of the listeners in diverse contexts, even those full of trouble" (4). The theme of thin places frames the sermon as a space that collapses the distance between God and our lives so that we may experience a transformational encounter with the divine (6). Each author presents their perspective during COVID-19 as a case study for homiletically traversing this thin place.

In chapter 2, Sancken delves into preaching in a disenchanted world. She first reflects on the ways that secularism and the privatization of faith have contested sources of ultimate authority and prioritized individual rather than communal beliefs. Within secularism the "buffered self" emerges internally insulated and with more autonomy, making it difficult to see God's activity in the world (27). Preachers can challenge the buffered self by focusing on human need and pulling back the veil of control so that listeners recognize their finitude (27). Sancken encourages preachers to re-engage with the transcendent nature of the divine, offering ways to connect with modern listeners by addressing their needs, proclaiming God's activity within the immanent world, and preaching the cross of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 3, Powery offers an intimate look at preaching on a university campus in the American South. He uses Duke University's history as a lens to examine its impacts and challenges of racism, especially during the pandemic's height. Offering personal testimony of what it has meant to preach as a Black man and Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, Powery paints a picture of the perennial sin of racism at the institution. As stated, "it is critical to acknowledge that all of human life, including the practice of preaching, is 'raced' already" (54). By highlighting the church's complicity in racism and the error of colorblindness, new possibilities for preaching emerge, including naming racism as sin, lamenting its effects, and celebrating God's goodness as a form of resistance.

In chapter 4, Rottman illuminates the thin place in the context of preaching in a prison during COVID-19. In a place that some may consider to be devoid of God's activity, the author gives detailed witness about the myriad ways God is active in prison ministry. Challenges such as injustice, loss of hope, and cross-cultural concerns abound. Yet, Christ's resurrection presence calls and transforms, providing reconciliation through fresh insights into interpreting scripture.

This book is a must-read and a source of comfort and inspiration for anyone seeking to faithfully craft and preach sermons. The authors offer three different contexts, along with sermon examples, to illustrate how the Holy Spirit is active in helping preachers get to God. The book gives hope for such visions and practical guidance for the preacher while assuring us that God is first getting to us.

Crystal DesVignes, Th.D. student, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina.