GRACEFUL SPEECH

An Invitation to Preaching

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Contents

Introduction

Each and every day, each and every hour, maybe each and every minute, somewhere in God's globe, the people whom God created and into whom God breathed the breath of life, gather to hear the good news of God's saving love for them. They sing and shout praises to God and learn how to live in the fellowship that gives them a glimpse of the heavenly community that awaits them. And each and every day, every hour, perhaps every minute, whether we call it preaching, a homily, teaching, or proclamation, someone stands before a community declaring the good news.

When I tell people what I do, I am often met with a puzzled look, followed by the question, "Can you teach people how to preach?" To which I joyfully respond, "Of course!"

Preaching is, to quote Thomas Edison, an intriguing mixture of inspiration and perspiration. Preachers are called by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit. But preaching is also a practice and art that can be studied and learned. Preachers are able to improve and grow in their preaching by listening to God and listening to skilled preachers and teachers. And so I offer this book to you, adding it to the marvelous collection of preaching textbooks that date back to the early history of the church, with the goal of strengthening the preaching of the church.

As I began this project, I asked preachers what they thought should be included in a preaching textbook. What had they learned in their preaching classrooms that they used every day? What did they wish that they had learned in their preaching classes, but didn't? What did they want to tell those who were just learning how to preach? Many of their comments and suggestions are woven into this book. I would like to single out one comment, however.

When I asked a friend what he wanted new preachers to know, his response was quick and certain: "Tell them that people are listening to what they say!" And I would agree. He is correct; people do listen.

As I write this introduction I am celebrating the twenty-fourth anniversary of my ordination as a deacon in the Episcopal Church. At my ordination I was given a Bible and reminded that the book was "the sign of your authority to proclaim God's Word." But while I was in seminary I had begun to learn that people do listen. During the spring of my first year of field work, the Third Sunday of Lent, I was given the opportunity to preach at the principal service. You can imagine how thrilled I was when I looked at the readings assigned for that day, only to discover that they included Jesus' warning that, "unless you repent, you will all perish," just as those who had been killed by Pilate or by the collapsing tower of Siloam. I worked carefully, preparing my sermon. I was ready, but as I finished preaching and looked out at the faces in the congregation, I realized that preaching was much more than my hard work and my study. Their silence told me something had happened that was far beyond my beginner's ability. I had done my best, but God had taken my message to a depth I would never have thought possible.

I learned that the people were listening. They were hungry to hear the word of God. And I knew that what I had learned in my preaching classes had helped to make that moment possible. It is my goal in writing this book that you will learn how important you are in the preaching equation. I hope that you will begin a process of reflection and study that will help you to become the best preacher God would have you to be.

To this task I bring many years of experience in the Episcopal Church. I bring the experience of being both welcomed and rejected as a servant of God. When I entered seminary in 1976, the Episcopal Church voted to ordain women as priests. But while the first regularly ordained women were ordained in 1979, acceptance is taking a great deal longer. Over the years I have had the privilege of getting to know and preach before many congregations. They have taught me what it means to be a preacher. You will find my sacramental background woven through this book.

I bring experience as a teacher. Since 1987 I have taught preaching at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. I write, therefore, out of an experience of teaching at a school that, although it is a United Methodist seminary, has a wonderfully diverse student body. I teach students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, of a wide denominational background, students who will be serving both inner-city parishes and small, rural churches. You will find my ecumenical experience also woven through this book.

And finally, you will find that this book reflects my background as a rhetorical scholar. I did my PhD work in rhetoric and communications and

have sought to bring that scholarly conversation to bear on my homiletical investigation.

In the chapters that follow I invite you into an exploration of what it means to be a preacher, who God is calling us to be, and how we can be the best preacher possible. The first part of the book, chapters 1–4, is devoted to the issues that provide a foundation for us as preachers. Chapter 1 examines a theological understanding that I believe informs who we are and what we do. Chapter 2 takes a historical approach to questions that continue to be crucial in the preaching enterprise. Chapters 3 and 4 examine your role and identity as a preacher.

In the second part of the book we turn our attention to the development of the sermon. Chapter 5 explores the identity and role of the listener in the preaching moment. Chapter 6 explores the preacher's approach to Bible study. Chapter 7 examines the other resources available to preachers in the preparation of their sermon. Chapter 8 discusses the form and arrangement of the sermon.

The final section of the book invites you to examine more effective ways to turn a written text into a *sermon*, the oral event of communicating the gospel. Chapter 9 focuses on language and illustration. In Chapter 10, we look at preaching for special occasions. Chapter 11 is devoted to the delivery and performance of the sermon. And in the final chapter I ask you to dream with me: Where is preaching going, and where should preaching be going in the future?

You have been given a wonderful gift in your call to preach. It is my hope that this book will help you as you learn to live into that gift.

Silver Spring, Maryland
The Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul

PART 1

Becoming a Preacher

1

Graceful Speech: Christian Communication

All spoke well of [Jesus]
and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.
Luke 4:22

The moment comes when our eyes are opened,
and we see and realize that grace is infinite.
Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us
but that we shall await it with confidence
and acknowledge it with gratitude.
Isak Dinesen, Babette's Feast

My heart overflows with a goodly theme; . . .
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. . . .
grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you forever.
Psalm 45:1–2

When people encounter the living God, they can't keep silent. The Scriptures are filled with the stories of those who met the living God, those whose eyes were opened and who realized that God's infinite grace poured over them. Likewise, the Scriptures are also filled with the words spoken by those grateful people and the songs they sang following those awe-filled moments.

Moses could not remain silent after turning aside and standing before the bush that burned but was not consumed. Filled with the grace of God, he stood in Pharaoh's court demanding the freedom of his people. Miriam saw the gracious love of God in the wind that drove back the sea, freeing the children of

Israel. She gathered the women about her and with timbrels they sang, "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea" (Exod. 15:21). With grace poured out on his lips by the burning coal, Isaiah shouted, "Here am I; send me!" (Isa. 6:8). And in response to the heavenly messenger's invitation, Mary proclaimed that the living God, who called her blessed, would continue to overthrow the powers of the earth. God, she declared, will "[bring] down the powerful from their thrones, and [lift] up the lowly" (Luke 1:52).

Through burning bushes, winds, live coals, and angels, God has communicated with the people whom God has created. God has demonstrated the love that God has for them, and called them to be and do things they never thought possible. In return, God's people, through the very grace of God who has called them, have lifted their voices in unending praise and thanks to God. "The Mighty One," Mary sang, "has done great things for me, and holy is his name." And Paul declared: "Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity; not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12).

The great good news is that God continues to love us and do great things for us; God continues to pour grace upon our lips, calling women and men to sing songs of praise, speak words of justice, challenge, confront, and announce to a world, seduced by the siren's call of sin and death, this good news of God's love. Like Mary and Paul and all the saints who have gone before us, women and men continue to be filled with the grace of God enabling them to praise God and declare the good news that God is still turning that world upside down, scattering those who depend only on themselves, and lifting up those who have fallen.

DOXOLOGY: NAMING GRACE

Praise, doxology, Jürgen Moltmann argues, is the appropriate response to God's over-flowing love and self-donation: "Real theology, which means the knowledge of God, finds expression in thanks, praise and adoration. And it is what finds expression in doxology that is the real theology. There is no experience of salvation without the expression of that experience in thanks, praise and joy" (Moltmann, 152). Praising God keeps us focused on the God who created us and continues to fill our lives and our world with saving love. So, we speak of God's great saving acts, recalling what God has done in the past and helping the people of God to learn to recognize where and how God is acting today. As Mary Catherine describes it, preaching is all about "naming grace," pointing to the "power and presence of God" (Hilkert, 45).

We become, for one another, therefore, the burning bushes, the wind, and the messengers, called by God to announce to the world God's great acts and to bring the good news of God's overflowing love and grace. God has poured grace into our lives and has opened our lips so that we might praise God's holy name and speak to one another words of love and comfort. Likewise, it is the grace of God working in the hearts and minds of our listeners that enables them to hear this great good news.

We communicate the story of our God who spoke to us in creation, in the incarnation, and in the breath of the Holy Spirit because we are made in the image of God, whom we have come to declare is characterized by communication in loving relationship. Preaching is one dimension of that broader communication. To understand Christian communication and preaching, let us turn our attention to the Trinity, the relational God who communicates God's own self to us.

THE ROUND TABLE OF THE TRINITY

St. Patrick may have used the clover, but Andrei Rublev, the preeminent iconographer in medieval Russia, used the table to paint for us an image of the mystery of the Trinity. In one of the most famous icons of the Trinity, Rublev drew on the story of Abraham and Sarah entertaining the angels (Gen. 18) to portray within our world the relationship among the divine persons. Seated around an earthly table, Abraham's tent has become the temple of Jerusalem and oaks of Mamre the tree of life. Abraham invited the strangers to rest under the tree, and so in Rublev's icon we see the three angelic figures enjoying Abraham's gracious hospitality. They are seated around the table on which Abraham has placed a chalice. Each figure looks at or gestures toward one of the other figures, creating an open, circular image of the *perichoresis*, the divine dance that is God. The icon, Catherine LaCugna observes, "expresses the fundamental insight of the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, that God is not far from us but lives among us in a communion of persons" (LaCugna, "God in Communion," 84).

Recently, homiletical scholars have returned to this Trinitarian table as an image of preaching. Lucy Rose wrote about preaching in the round-table church, and John McClure described the "Round-table Pulpit." We speak, shout, praise, sing, and preach because we have been created in the image of this God in communion, whose grace fills the earth and whose breath and voice bring all life into being. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said; "let there be light"; and there was light" (Gen. 1:1–3). The writer

of Genesis tells us that it was the very breath of God that moved over the water of chaos, separating the land from the water, the dark from the light. God spoke and trees, flowers, fish, birds, and humans came into being. We communicate with God and with one another because of God's self-communication within God's self and self-communication to us.

In the doctrine of the Trinity we come to know who and what God is like. As Catherine LaCugna observes, "The ultimate aim of the doctrine of the Trinity is not to produce a theory of God's self-relatedness. . . . The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to say something not only about God, or only about the recipient of the divine self-communication, but about the encounter between God and humankind and indeed with everything that exists" (LaCugna, *God for Us*, 320).

PENTECOST TO TRINITY

At the close of the time of the New Testament, the early Christians had experienced God as *Abba*, as Christ, and as Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that after the startling events of Pentecost, those who "believed" gathered together "praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2:47). They told of what God had done in Jesus, how, though he had died, God had raised him, and how they had been sent out to continue to tell this good news. But what did it all mean? Who was this Jesus that they had known and followed? What was the relationship between Jesus and the one that he called "*Abba*"? How did the death and resurrection of Jesus bring about our salvation? While it took centuries for the early church to begin to make sense of what was meant by what we call the Trinity, by the fourth century the Trinitarian understanding of God as one nature and three persons had come to be the orthodox position.

At the Council of Nicaea in 325 the church rejected Arianism and declared that Jesus Christ was God, that he was begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father. Jesus was not an intermediary or "demigod," but was in fact God, who had come into the world. To speak of Jesus, who he was, what he said and did, was to speak of the transcendent God. To know Jesus was to know God. And this speaking, this reflection was made possible by the ongoing grace of God, the Holy Spirit poured out into the world. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity declares that we know God because God makes God's self known to us through God's saving acts in the world, but especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us both about the *immanent* Trinity—God's eternal being and inner life—and the *economic* Trinity, salvation history, and God's relationship with us.

RECOVERING THE FULLNESS OF THE TRINITY

Over the centuries more attention was paid to the immanent Trinity, to God's nature, and less to the economic Trinity. Consequently, the doctrine of the Trinity came to be viewed as an abstract theological concept that had little or nothing to do with the daily, practical life of the Christian. We neglected the image of the table set in our midst.

At the urging of many major twentieth-century theologians—Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann—the church turned a corrective eye toward the doctrine of the Trinity in order to renew and recover this understanding that is central to our identity and belief as Christians. The Trinity is not, they argued, an abstract, outdated, and outmoded thought. Rather, it is the way that we are able to speak about who God is, how God acts in our world, and how God is in relationship to us, to the world. Catherine LaCugna observes that the doctrine of the Trinity is

> the affirmation of God's intimate communion with us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. As such it is an eminently practical doctrine with far-reaching consequences for Christian life. . . . In Jesus Christ, the ineffable and invisible God saves us from sin and death; by the power of the Holy Spirit, God continues to be altogether present to us, seeking everlasting communion with all creatures. (LaCugna, *God for Us*, ix)

In other words, David Cunningham observes, "the doctrine of the Trinity postulates an integral connection between God's own character and God's relationship to the world" (Cunningham, 57). This character and this relationship shape who we are and what we do as preachers.

What does it mean to say that God is one nature and three persons? What are some of the characteristics of God with which we have been reacquainted by a revitalized theology of the Trinity? How do these characteristics shed light on our role as grace-filled, and therefore graceful, communicators? There are many, but three are central: relationality, mutuality, and participation.

Relationality

Many of us live in cultures that celebrate and prize autonomy and independence. Whether we ground that understanding in Descartes's "*Cogito ergo sum*," or Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way," our sense of personal freedom and self-reliance takes priority over all relationships—with God and with our family, friends, and neighbors. Paul spoke of the church as the body, and each of us as a separate but necessary part. He understood that if I were an eye within the

body of the church, I might be necessary, but without the hand or foot or others I could not function. Today we prefer to think of ourselves as full, complete human beings who join with other full, complete human beings. The church is viewed as a collection of separate, finite individuals who come together by choice, rather than a community that comes together out of necessity because we need one other. Do we understand that we *need* to be in relationship in order to be whole and complete? Rather than "doing it our way," what if we are to do it *God's way*?

To speak of God as three persons in one communal relationship is to speak of difference. The Father is different from the Son, and they are each different from the Spirit. Each is a distinct, unique "other." And yet, they are in a relationship of oneness. In this relationship, Elizabeth Johnson notes, "Relationality is the principle that at once constitutes each trinitarian person as unique and distinguishes one from another" (Johnson, 216).

In the Eastern Church's understanding of the Trinity, being in relationship was the "supreme characteristic of God" (LaCugna, "God in Communion," 91). In the *immanent* Trinity, therefore, the Father was understood to be a full and complete "person," but only when understood to be in community, in relation to the Son and to the Spirit; "the three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another" (LaCugna, *God for Us*, 270–71). If we think back to Rublev's icon of the Trinity, there are three divine beings sitting about the table, but to remove one would not leave an empty space at the table; it would remove the entire being.

Rublev drew on the image of the table, but early Greek Fathers referred to this relationality as the *perichoresis* of the Trinity. Close to the Greek word for dancing in a circle, this word presents us with an image of Father, Son, and Spirit in a dynamic, transcendent, self-giving, self-receiving "divine dance."

As preachers, we are engaged in the same kind of dance. As Martin Buber put it, "In the beginning is the relation" (Buber,18). Our lives as preachers are informed by the reality that we are not individuals who choose to be in relationships, but rather we preach the Word in a milieu in which relationships with God and other persons—even when they are estranged—are in the foreground.

Mutuality

What is the character of the relationship among these three different divine persons? It is not just enough to say that they are in relationship. As David Cunningham observes, there are very different degrees and qualities of relationships (Cunningham, 165). Some are deep and long lasting, others superficial, and some are abusive. To say that individuals are in relationship does not

tell us enough. The doctrine of the Trinity declares that the divine persons are in a relationship of radical equality and mutuality.

A principal argument in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity revolved around the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. As we noted earlier, Arius (whose ideas were eventually declared heretical) taught that the Father was superior to the Son. But, as Cunningham goes on to note, "One of the central claims of classical trinitarianism is that the Three are radically equal to one another; none is in a position of superiority over the others" (Cunningham, 111).

It is difficult for us, I believe, to imagine what that looks like and what it means to live in such a relationship. By applying the terms Father and Son to the different persons of the Trinity, we imply a hierarchical relationship. I certainly knew, when I was growing up, that I was *not* in a relationship of "radical equality" when my mother or father asked me to do something that I didn't want to do—mow the lawn or clean my room. We value autonomy and individual freedom, yet we also live in a world that compares and contrasts our autonomy to that of those autonomous others. Some are our superiors, others are our inferiors. Consequently, our thinking is challenged when it comes to the Trinity.

In spite of the fact that we speak about the Trinity in terms of the parental-filial relationship or numerically of the first, second, and third persons of the Trinity, theirs is a relationship of coequality. The persons of the Trinity join in the divine dance where all are equal; no one person leads and no one follows. Elizabeth Johnson observes, "They are coequal in divinity, greatness, and love. . . . There is no subordination, no before, or after, no first, second, and third, no dominant and marginalized. . . . The trinitarian symbol intimates a community of equals" where difference flourishes and does not exclude or threaten the relationship (Johnson, 219).

This image of a discipleship of equals also makes a difference for preachers and pastors who understand their responsibilities as speakers and hearers within the community of faith. Relationality and mutuality recognize that the authentic differences among persons, their sometimes enriching and challenging otherness, are part of the communicative structure within which preachers are called to engage in their task.

Participation

Another way of envisioning the relationality of the Trinity is the concept of participation. The persons of the Trinity "participate" with one another in a profound way. It is not just the idea of taking part in or working alongside someone. Rather, as David Cunningham suggests, "I am interested in those

instances in which we take part, not in some*thing*, but in some*one*—an *other*. . . dwelling in, and being indwelt by, one another" (Cunningham, 166). Each person of the Trinity dwells in and is indwelt by the other persons of the Trinity. It is a deep relationship of communion and fellowship that characterizes not only the *immanent* Trinity, God's self, but the *economic* Trinity, our relationship with God, as well. God invites humanity to join in the dance.

Rather than dancing, perhaps we should use the image of juggling when envisioning the participation in and with the Trinity—the juggling of radically different things. How do we combine things that are different so that they are all equal and are able to exist in unity? How can we speak of a God who is omnipotent, transcendent, eternal, and at the same time, Emmanuel, God with us? "The Beyond and the Intimate," Ted Peters notes, is a challenge at the center of our relationship with God. He asks how we are to hold together "God's eternity and the world's temporality. To know God as only the eternal one beyond time is not enough. We need to know God also as intimate," as God with us (Peters, 19).

We know that intimate God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that God in the Spirit who dwells with us, even until the end of time. We know that we have been invited by the living and loving God to participate in this relationship of mutual equality. The incarnation of the Word demonstrates that God dwells not only within God, but within us. "It would be hard to imagine a more thoroughgoing instance of mutual participating between humanity and God. . . . [And] the significance of the incarnation is precisely its revelation of a more intimate relationship between God and human beings than was ordinarily thought possible" (Cunningham, 181–82). As preachers, we model the intimacy of that relationship of the Trinitarian persons among themselves and with us. Pastors genuinely participate in the lives of those around them, and their preaching is part of that participation.

And so we lift our voices to praise the God who has created us, redeems us, and sustains us. We declare that God is three persons in one nature, in one joyous, divine dance, and that we have not only been created in the image of this dancing, loving God, but been invited to participate in this life of radical, mutually indwelling equality. The doctrine of the Trinity grounds everything we are, everything we do, and everything we say. It, therefore, is the grounding for our theology of preaching.

GIVING SPEECH TO MORTALS: A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

If we have been created in the image of the God who is three persons in one nature, if we have been created in the image of the God who took on flesh and

entered into a relationship, communicating with the human beings that God had created, what does this mean for our preaching? It means that we are incarnate, human preachers, who preach the graced word of God by the grace of God within a community of love and radical equality. But more concretely, what does a Trinitarian theology of preaching look like?

We Are Essential

Moses offered numerous objections when God called him to speak, not the least of which was his inability to speak. "O my LORD, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exod. 4:10). Moses thought that it was all up to him. He forgot the source and grounding for his message: "Who gives speech to mortals? . . . Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exod. 4:11). It is God who has given speech to mortals. It is God who will "be with [our] mouth, and teach [us] what [we] are to speak" (Exod. 4:12). We speak because we have been created in the image of a communicating God.

The temptation, however, is to think that we do not have to do anything, that God's Spirit will do all of the work. That is not true. You are an essential part of the divine dance that is preaching. God has called you to bring your thoughts, your questions, your experiences to the preaching task and preaching moment. Each of us has an important, essential role to play.

Each of the three persons of the Trinity is associated with a particular activity. For example, God the Father is the creator. This is known as the doctrine of *appropriations*. "We 'appropriate' a particular activity to one of the Three, in order that we might better understand its role in the overall divine plan" (Cunningham, 117). Likewise, we have been called, by God, into particular activities. There are times when we are to be the speaker and other times when we are to be the listener. Each is an essential, particular role in graceful communications.

The Preaching Round Table

If we go back to the image of the round table that is the Trinity, we are called to affirm that each member of the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—is essential. Who are the "persons" who gather around the preaching table?

God is seated at the table, the God who has called us to speak and who fills us with grace. There is the preacher, who prepares and delivers the sermon. And there is the listener, who receives the preached word of God. Each is an active, essential member at the table. We have been called by the triune God to gather at the table in a relationship of radical equality, echoing the relationship

of the three in one. The preacher is essential, but not superior to the listener. Likewise, if you remove the listener, there is no preaching.

We are called to be in relationship with God and gathered around the table set by the God who created us. We are to view the preaching moment, not as the enlightened and learned informing the ignorant, not as the superior educating the inferior, but as all the people of God gathering to praise the God who gives them life and to declare God's saving acts in and among them.

Naming Grace

Earlier I wrote of Mary Catherine Hilkert's description of preaching. Preachers, she observed, are engaged in the important task of identifying and declaring God's saving acts. Preaching is "naming grace":

> Because human beings are essentially embodied and social, however, grace as the spiritual mystery at the heart of reality has to be manifested in concrete, historical, visible ways. God's presence is mediated in and through creation and human history, but that mystery remains hidden and untapped unless it is brought to word. (Hilkert, 47)

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We came to know God as one who walked in the world, who ate with us, who spoke to us words of justice and empowerment. We know that God loves us even more than life itself. God suffered and died as one of us and assured us that God would be with us "to the end of the age." Therefore, Hilkert observes, "preachers listen with attentiveness to human experience because they are convinced that revelation is located in human history, in the depths of human experience" (Hilkert, 49). As preachers we proclaim that "the creative Spirit of God who was active in the history of Israel, in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in the church of the past, in the lives of the saints, is still active today" (Hilkert, 48–49). God is active and participating in every point of our preaching. God is with us as we begin to prepare our sermon, in our study of the Scriptures, in the crafting of the sermon throughout the week.

A CHALLENGE TO GET STARTED

God has created us to be loving, communicating people. This book focuses on one dimension of our communication: preaching. Throughout this book we will explore many of the variables in the moment, the event, the relationship that is preaching; and they are numerous. Whether you are reading this book on your own or as a part of a preaching course, I challenge you to reflect on a series of questions that are crucial to your preaching.

At first it seems rather easy to answer the crucial questions: What is a sermon? and Who is a preacher? A sermon, approximately ten minutes long, discusses the lessons appointed by the lectionary for the day, applies those lessons to the lives of the congregation, and prepares them to receive the Eucharist. The sermon is delivered by an ordained person appointed by the church. Yes, for some. For others, a sermon is fifty minutes long with a text that has been given to the preacher by the Holy Spirit, and it will end in an altar call. The preacher is the one anointed by the Holy Spirit. Yes, that is true for others. And for others the sermon is delivered by the teaching elder, will last approximately twenty minutes, and will explore the meaning of a particular biblical text, doctrinal issue, or pertinent topic. Which is correct? One of the goals of this book will invite you to understand how complex the answers to these questions are and to explore answers to these and many other questions.

You bring to these questions your experiences. You will explore them with your local congregations, and denominational leadership; you will explore them within your denominational tradition. Some of you are involved with congregations that have rejected the past ways that the church has answered these questions and believe that you are starting afresh to address these topics.

A major goal of this book, therefore, in addition to offering you advice and suggestions on how to write a sermon, is to invite you into, and give you resources for, answering these central questions. It is all too easy to learn the nuts and bolts, the "how-tos" of preaching without being challenged to develop a theology of preaching. Consider yourself so challenged.

Let's begin.

QUESTIONS

1. What is a sermon?
2. How is God involved in what is said?
3. What or who is a preacher? Who am I when I step into the pulpit?
4. What does it mean for me to preach?
5. What does the congregation think that I am doing when I preach? Who do they think that I am?

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