

Abstract

PEER MENTORING FOR PREACHERS: HELPING PRIESTS BECOME BETTER
PREACHERS

THE REV. SHARON HIERS

Project under the direction of Dr. William Brosend

This project focuses on the monumental task of helping priests effectively communicate and answer the homiletical question in the 12-15 minute window of time they have for a sermon each Sunday. The homiletical question every preacher must ask in crafting a sermon is this: What does the Holy Spirit want the people of God to hear from these texts on this occasion? Through peer mentoring, this project pilots a way for priests to listen and give critical feedback to the preached sermon. The goal of this project is to help priests become better preachers by discussing content, theology, delivery and clarity of their preaching with their peers.

Before the peer group began to meet, some clarity and teaching around how to mentor was sought. Through homiletical classes at The School of Theology, Sewanee and the Preaching Excellence Program offered by The Episcopal Preaching Foundation, a great deal of exposure and learning took place. Under the primary direction of The Rev. Dr. William Brosend, I was able to learn a great deal about what make a sermon good, how to listen to a sermon, and how to offer critical and constructive feedback to peers.

Then, the pilot program took off among six priests in our first 10 years of ministry or less, in and around the Atlanta, GA area. These priest took turns sharing sermons and with some guidance, learned how to give and receive feedback over a period of six month. In listening to others preach, and applying the homiletical question, the critique

and feedback grew over time, and each member agreed that the experience was invaluable.

As was noted in the proposal for this project, the preacher can never tire from her task. The imperative to preach the good news of Jesus Christ is never to be taken lightly, or allowed to go stale. While the fully human preacher can sometimes get derailed in the tasks of a week, this 12-15 minutes are for many the most refreshing and nourishing words a parishioner may hear. And what's needs to be heard is the good news in ways that ensures the listener that the preacher believes it with all she has to give.

For many, the only feedback the preacher receives is the obligatory "nice sermon" as parishioners head out for another week in the life. And for many, there is little exposure to preaching skills after seminary. If a priest is not willing to seek out feedback or take some continuing education classes, or at least to hear sermons by other preachers with a critical ear, they may find themselves become stagnant. The gospel can not afford a preacher who is anything less than fully alive in Christ, and passionately willing to share the Good News.

The project is hopefully the beginning of a new way for clergy to mentor each other around preaching. With the success of the first group, the goal is to join with a broader audience including priests in other diocese to help start groups for priests to engage their preaching, or re-engage with their passion for preaching. The gospel demands no less.

Approved _____ Date _____
Advisor

Peer Mentoring for Preachers:
Helping Priests Become Better Preachers

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“I could have used you and your DMin peeps tonight. I buzzed the tower about 10 times before I finally landed that plane. As I was saying it, I was consciously thinking, ‘That was an ending. That was another ending. That should have been the end. Why am I still talking?’ Not pretty.”
- An email from The Rev. Linda Nye, Preacher

Linda is not alone. She is not alone in her struggle with preaching, with finding the right words to say and only saying those words. She is not alone with all the reasons why she still preached the sermon anyway. Sadly, however Linda may be alone in her conscious thinking, as many sermons metaphorically “buzz the tower about 10 times” and the pilot-preacher is not even aware of it happening.

Missed endings, however, are not the only issues preachers face in sermons. Harry Emerson Fosdick recognized a number of issues with preaching and in 1928, wrote the article *What Is the Matter with Preaching?* published in *Harper's Magazine*. In it, Fosdick blatantly addresses the widespread epidemic of the mediocre sermon. He blasts “One obvious trouble with the mediocre sermon, even when harmless, is that it is uninteresting...No one who has any business to preach at all need preach uninteresting sermons”¹ Fosdick stresses in his article that sermons should address real problems, make the hearer think, engage the congregation quickly, and use creative preaching in response to knowledge of the real lives of those to whom she or he is preaching.

Further, Thomas Long, writing about preaching, notes other areas where we as preachers fall short, be it in content, style, language, purpose, relevance, or delivery.²

¹ Graves, Mike ed. *What's The Matter With Preaching Today?* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY 2004) p8.

² *ibid*, p145.

At some point, with all that can go wrong for us in our preaching, the question becomes: With a task and privilege as critical as proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, how does the preacher, post-seminary, continually renew their commitment and desire to preach, and grow in their skills for preaching? This project, while it acknowledges there are a variety of answers to this question, will explore and pilot a peer mentoring group as a highly beneficial response to helping priests become better preachers.

The primary step for a preacher then is to be willing to receive feedback on a sermon. It is our ego that can often get in the way. In his book *Best Advice for Preaching*, John McClure writes:

“Preachers remain fully human. We all like to be liked. It becomes extremely difficult to separate ourselves from our sermons. Criticizing a sermon has been likened to saying something about a mother’s firstborn child. If we have poured heart and soul into a sermon’s composition, it becomes hard to determine where the sermon ends and we begin or vice versa.”³

I believe this is, in part, why a peer mentoring program is a highly effective way for preachers to hear and receive feedback on their sermons. When the acquired skill of the clergy mentor is facilitating discussion and offering resources and comments to help fellow priests, and when everyone participates in sharing a sermon and offering feedback, the threat to the preacher diminishes greatly. Everyone is both preacher and hearer at some point in the experience.

There are usually some growing pangs that happen for a preacher around three to five years out of seminary. They realize that the feedback they received on their

³ John. S. McClure, *Best Advice For Preaching* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1988) p142-143.

preaching was valuable, and now an obligatory “nice sermon, Sharon” as a congregant leaves on Sunday morning isn’t cutting it for them anymore. So, the preacher decides he or she is ready to engage a formal process of feedback, but how? While asking parishioners to fill out their seminary-style form is common, particularly for new priests, it creates an interesting dynamic between preacher and parishioner, and often the parishioner has no particular skill to give this sort of feedback anyway. Enter peer mentoring.

Mentoring, and specifically peer mentoring, is not a new concept. It has been employed in the business world and secular world for years. In a series of books published by Harvard Business Essentials, one such volume is *Coaching and Mentoring: How to Develop Top Talent and Achieve Stronger Performance*. Two statements translate from the business world of management to preaching:

1. “Peer-to-peer mentoring rests on this solid premise: Ambitious and hardworking young managers have a great deal to learn from each other, and because they have shared experiences, they can empathize and provide mutual support.”⁴
2. “Peer mentoring works best when (1) peers agree that each has something to learn from the other, (2) when confidentiality can be maintained, and (3) when each is willing to reciprocate.”⁵

Preachers do have a great deal to learn from each other and those shared experiences do help to empathize and provide mutual support. There also has to be present in the group a deep mutual respect for each other so that trust and confidentiality can be maintained.

⁴ *Coaching and Mentoring: How to Develop Top Talent and Achieve Stronger Performance* (Harvard Business School Press: Boston, MA 2004) p123.

⁵ *ibid*, p125.

And finally, reciprocation is the heart of sharing these sermons and our feedback with each other in the process.

Peer mentoring for preachers, at least for this project, looks like this: A group of four to six priests commit to gathering together once a month to talk about preaching. A week or so ahead of time, one priest shares an audio of a sermon they would like to receive feedback on. When the group gathers, the mentor-leader helps the members discuss the sermon using a variety of learned techniques. After thorough discussion, the group then does a lectionary study on an upcoming text in preparation for writing another sermon. This is repeated the next session with a different preacher until all participants have offered a sermon and received informed feedback.

What follows in the rest of this paper are the steps taken to use peer mentoring as a tool for preachers to further their craft. As outlined in the proposal, each step will unfold as this project aimed toward these two goals:

1. Give preachers effective and critical feedback in their preaching in a way in which the primary goal is to renew a preacher's commitment and desire to preach and help the priest grow in their skills for preaching.
2. Create a draft or outline of a manual for preaching mentors that will explore how to implement a similar mentoring group among priests, and how to give critical feedback.

The year-long timeline and process can be found in APPENDIX A.

Step One: Learning to be an effective preaching mentor

The first step for me as the convener of a pilot peer mentor group on preaching in my home diocese was to learn the craft of mentoring first hand. This began by returning to a seminary class on preaching, led Dr. Bill Brosend. This time, instead of being a student receiving feedback on preached sermons, I observed and learned the art of giving feedback and initiating discussion by listening and sharing alongside Dr. Brosend as mentor.

By the middle of the Easter semester, the seniors of The School of Theology class of 2014 were preaching sermons frequently in small groups. On March 28, I made the trip to Sewanee to attend the first of four classes, with the permission and understanding of the students. I would be there to hear their preaching, but moreover to learn how to mentor and give feedback by first listening to Dr. Brosend, then offering it as well. I also received permission from the students to be copied on the written comments Dr. Brosend sent to each of them after they preached. In addition, a few of them asked if I would send written feedback as well, which I did after clearing it with Dr. Brosend. This showed me the difference of two ways of giving feedback in a group: a) publicly, for all the students to glean from, and b) direct written feedback to the preacher, often including more critical comments along with the grade from the professor for the student only. The students were very generous and for that I am grateful.

The classes were designed to provide discussion regarding the sermons of five preachers. As I learned about mentoring, I was particularly interested in the different feedback approaches Dr. Brosend used from week to week. At times, he gave his own

thoughts, but more often he began the conversation with a question or statement inviting the group into discussion. It is the latter that is the sweet spot of being a peer mentor in preaching. The mentor is the one who helps the rest of the group to name what works and does not work in a sermon, so that every voice is heard, and every message strengthened. Also, I believe a variety of ways to “get at a sermon” with a consistent group of individuals is extremely helpful.

As noted, the methods Dr. Brosend used to facilitate discussions varied. Once after hearing a group of sermons, he asked the preachers to respond first on how they felt about the preached sermon. Responses included: “It felt okay, but I was a going too fast” and “I really struggled to get through it because Paul is hard for me” and “I think the transitions could have been tighter, but it feels more complete than the last sermon I preached.” In another session, he asked participants what the focus sentence or purpose of each sermon was from the perspective of the listeners. And yet another time he asked the group “Who had the best introduction? Why? What drew you in?” After this exercise, Dr. Brosend emphasized two key points: 1) a preacher should write the ending of a sermon first, the part you want people to take with them through the liturgy and out the door, and then 2) return and introduce the sermon about to be preached, avoiding the temptation to make the introduction merely a way to win affections.

The topics he covered in his feedback also varied. He commented on delivery, theology, scriptural interpretation, and style. Posture was a part of discussion as well - particularly noting the “pulpit grabbers” or those who in nervousness moved around too much. In discussing styles of preaching, he discussed preaching extemporaneously, with

notes, and with a full manuscript. Dr. Brosend stressed “The more you have at stake the more you need a manuscript, for example, funerals. You need a personal hook - to hang their grief on.”

One student consistently missed her ending in a sermon, often multiple times, which he pointed out for her in written feedback. As to length - usually too much is the problem. Or preaching more than one sermon. Missing an ending is far too often the issue with a great sermon. Dr. Brosend also encouraged the preachers to use Dr. Lauren Winner’s method of a “reverse outline” to see how their sermon unfolds. One student made ten (too many) moves in a nineteen minute (too long) sermon, and with an outline that may have been avoided.

Another student gave a sermon that really wasn’t a sermon at all, and had some red flags in his delivery to the point of seeming angry. Again, in written feedback, Dr. Brosend made note of it. Additionally, he pointed out when a sermon went from being one of affirmation to exhortation. In some cases, Dr. Brosend also disagreed with the content being preached - for instance he remarked to a student that he did not agree with his Christology. In terms of doctrinal preaching, Dr. Brosend wrote: “We generally do not worry so much about the relational and illustrative in an intentionally theological sermon, but about clarity.” This led to the idea of preaching on doctrines, specifically on feast days.

Apart from hearing some 20 plus sermons and specific feedback on each one which was a learning experience in itself, my time in the classroom with Dr. Brosend taught me a great deal about how to mentor preachers. It was first very fruitful to be back

in the classroom and hear some refreshers on preaching in general. Second, I learned some specific techniques regarding how to get a group of preachers to talk to each other about preaching. Third, I learned how to offer feedback in way that is constructive, with a balance between mere suggestions and critical evaluation - including different foci and the depth of feedback. Finally, I learned how to invite preachers to listen for what makes a sermon good, which moves us to the next step.

Step Two: Listening and learning from those who mentor

This year's Preaching Excellence Program (PEP) offered by the Episcopal Preaching Foundation was held in Richmond, Virginia May 25-30, 2014. PEP is the centerpiece of the Episcopal Preaching Foundation whose aim is to "encourage and enhance preaching in the Episcopal Church."⁶ While PEP has been offered to seminarians for over 25 years, this was the first year that PEP II was offered. PEP II is a program designed for priests who have been ordained between three and five years, and "know what they don't know"⁷ about preaching. In addition, there are faculty-led workshops in preaching, and the faculty preach the worship services as well. It is an intense boot camp, or re-boot camp on preaching, packed with a variety of ways to help the preacher with her art.

⁶ <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2013/06/03/episcopal-preaching-foundation-celebrates-25-years/>

⁷ From *The Language of Preaching: Sermons and Comments from the Preaching Excellence Program May 25–May 30, 2014* Volume XXIII

While I attended PEP as a seminarian in the summer of 2006, I attended PEP II in 2014 as both a participant in the program, and also as an observer of the faculty in order to learn mentoring styles from a variety of different preaching mentors. The faculty was comprised of experienced preachers who have a firm grasp on what a good sermon is and are able to preach so that the gospel is proclaimed in a way people hear it. PEP II was an extremely beneficial to me as I had three ways of growing as a preacher and mentor: 1) feedback for my own preaching in small group 2) workshop participation and 3) observing a variety of mentors.

There are two important and related categories of what I learned and gleaned at PEP/PEP II 2014. The first pertains to preaching in general, which was mostly received during the workshops. The second is about mentoring, which I observed as I moved from small group to small group, listening to how the faculty encouraged discussion and gave feedback. Both of these topics are key to being a peer mentor in preaching. Here I will offer a summary of what I heard that is new and noteworthy, and that I find particularly helpful in working with preachers.

PREACHING

The workshops offered more gems than I ever expected from the faculty and individual preaching sessions. Listed below are some of the highlights and take-aways:

- Worry less about relevance and more about resonance (The Rev. Canon Mark Oakley)
- Preachers are invited to change the hard full stop of listener's lives into a comma (Canon Oakley)

- God has given you a gift: your being. God is asking for a gift back: your becoming (Canon Oakley)
- We have to see the words we use as being sacramental: Outward and *audible* signs of inward and spiritual grace (Canon Oakley)
- It's like slices of a pie. (Canon Oakley) There are:
 - Things you know you know
 - Things you know don't know
 - Things you know but have forgotten
 - Things you don't know you don't know
 - Things you think you know but really don't

And here is how that translates to preaching:

 - Those who know they know the gospel
 - Those who don't know and are hungry for information
 - Those who know but have forgotten
 - But really don't - confused the gospel with own prejudice
 - Don't know what don't know - *preachers must aim here*
- Preaching is a soul stretching, gut wrenching, sleep depriving task (The Rev. Dr. Sam Lloyd)
- 15 things Dr. Lloyd wishes someone would have told him about being a preacher:
 1. Sermonettes make Christianettes
 2. Two cheers for the lectionary, but not three - series work
 3. Forget about tying bows over the lessons
 4. Plan preaching ahead - look at lectionary ahead
 5. Preach a real sermon
 6. Read like crazy. Everything. Novels. Nonfiction. New Yorker. Christian Century.
 7. Keep files - like commonplace book
 8. Change the plot of sermons
 9. Can't give what you ain't got
 10. Keep a sense of mystery and wonder in sermons
 11. Get feedback on your preaching
 12. Avoid clichés
 13. Be conscious of your stance - teacher prophet fellow seeker
 14. Be fiercely protective of your time
 15. Always be able to answer the question SO WHAT?
- Poems and sermons want to be read and spoken aloud but exist on a page (The Rev. Dr. Lauren Winner)

- What do we have to learn from poets? (Dr. Winner)
 1. Diction - pay attention to word choice - Rock versus stone
 2. Pacing and structure
 3. Use of image - bar emotion words from sermons. You are approaching getting sentimental when the writer feels more than the reader does - so don't do it
 4. Use poetic devices - like rhyme and repetition
 5. Clichés - don't use them - no one knows what a Lenten journey is

- Good sermons take the risk of offending people (The Very Rev. Sam Candler)

- What makes a sermon good? (Handout from Dr. Bill Brosend)
 - ❖ Exegetical insight - the “I didn’t know I didn’t know that” moment
 - ❖ Theological depth - people want to talk about God
 - ❖ Liturgical awareness - always keeping in view the place of the sermon
 - ❖ Connection - relevance *and* resonance
 - ❖ Persuasion

- The preaching of Jesus is: proclamatory, dialogical, occasionally self-referential, and persistently figurative (Dr. Brosend)

- There are three keys:(Dr. Brosend)
 1. We ask the homiletical question: *What does the Holy Spirit want the people of God to hear from these texts on this occasion?*
 2. We develop and deploy appropriate and effective illustrative material including scripture, history and tradition, culture, experience and making stuff up.
 3. We hone and practice our style and delivery to maximize our effectiveness

MENTORING

As I moved from preaching group to preaching group, I was able to experiences the depth and breadth of different ways the faculty members mentored. The first group I went to was facilitated by Dr. Lauren Winner and The Very Rev. Sam Candler. The format was to have the preacher preach the sermon then immediately discuss it before moving to the next preacher/sermon. After the first sermon, Dr. Winner asked this question to the preacher: What blew your mind and what would you do differently?

After the preacher had uninterrupted time to answer these two questions, she then asked the rest of the room these same questions. It was a great way to open dialogue within the group of preachers. The last question she asked of the group as a whole: Where is God in this sermon?

In my observance of Dr. Winner and Dean Candler, I found their methods for giving feedback helpful. Dr. Winner noted that the first preacher had good pitch, a relatively restrained use of the first person, and that the image and vignette were absolutely related. Dean Candler noted to the second preacher that by putting an emotion (fear) in the context of a child, we could experience it but had a little distance so as not to be too overwhelming. He also encouraged the preacher to return to the same words used in the opening in his closing since the theme carried well otherwise.

One other note about mentoring came in the workshop Dr. Winner offered on “Wondrous Preaching.” The description read: “This workshop will consider two marvelous examples of luminous preaching, and explore the implications for our own work.”⁸ I was particularly impacted by Margaret Moers Wenig’s “God Is A Woman And She Is Growing Older” from Reform Judaism magazine in the Fall of 1992. In this style of writing, style of preaching, the author/preacher takes creative liberty in God’s longing for us. It is so beautifully crafted with such imagery, yet deeply, deeply theological. What I learned from this workshop, this exercise, was the gift of sharing something similar in the clergy mentoring group and discussing it. It has had a direct impact on my preaching, and I have even tried a sermon loosely based on this sort of midrash style. I

⁸ From PEP handout

have put this idea of opening up our ways of preaching as an option for discussion in future or new peer mentoring groups.

My second opportunity to observe a mentor was to join the clergy group facilitated by The Rev. Brent Norris. Each preacher in this group also gave a sermon then immediately received feedback. After the first sermon, Father Norris asked the preacher “how was that for you?” and gave her some space to process it for the group. Then he asked the group: “What did the preacher want you to know or do in this sermon?” and he went around the room and asked for one declarative statement from each person. What was particularly interesting with the first preacher, was there were clearly two different messages being heard from these one sentence statements. This further opened the discussion for where one sermon actually became two, and how to extract them from each other, and to be aware when you might have made that shift. I found this a brilliant opening by the mentor of this group.

Father Norris did not mince words when giving feedback to either preacher. He was direct and in that context, very well received. Father Norris noted for the second preacher that he was using far too much church lingo, and suggested he try and get out of that habit quickly. Father Norris also taught the group about the Lowry model of preaching, including handouts for new and alternative ways to craft sermons, which was something new I had not seen in other mentor groups. It was very well received.

My third and last group to attend was with Dr. Bill Brosend and The Rev. Canon Mark Oakley. Canon Oakley’s method was to allow the room to be silent after a sermon until someone said something about it and to let the group generate the first comments.

After offering my sermon, Canon Oakley asked this question to the group: “Who did we become during this sermon?” Then he asked me “Who do you think people are becoming in your presence and who do you want them to become? Do these two things coincide?” Canon Oakley noted that when I preach, I barely move. He felt grounded by my delivery style allowing him to focus and he listen without distraction. Canon Oakley’s way of mentoring helped show how delivery affects the preaching event as well.

PEP/PEP II was fruitful for me on a variety of levels. Listening to such a depth of varied preachers and sermons, different ways of mentoring, and workshops on specific topics was invaluable in learning to become a preaching mentor. Ultimately, this exposure to assorted styles of mentoring created a great tool bag of options for how to reflect on a sermon.

There is one further experience that was useful in learning how to mentor preachers, and that was during the 2014 Advanced Degrees Program. After I preached for my small group, Dr. Winner asked two questions that were extremely helpful, and that I have added to my mentoring tool bag. First, she asked of my colleagues “what do we want more or less of in this sermon?” which opened a great deal of discussion. Then she asked me: “What are you trying to do to or for your parishioners in this sermon?” which might be one of my favorite questions. Partly because it took me longer than I had hoped to answer it, which subsequently has become a question I ask myself before I preach a sermon. The continuum of learning about preaching and mentoring other preachers is always in motion.

Step Three: Peer Mentoring: The Clergy Group

In late January, I created a list of requirements for the pilot clergy mentor group on preaching and then considered priests I knew who might be interested in participating. I looked for preachers who had been ordained between 5-10 years, and had the potential of at least 15 more years of active ministry and preaching, in hopes of attracting those with a continued passion for sharing the good news. Additionally, I only considered Episcopal priests for this group. Since I live in Atlanta, there are plenty of Episcopal priests making it easy to have that as a qualifying factor for the group. Finally, I wanted somewhere between 4-6 preachers in the group, including myself.

I emailed the first five priests I identified, informing each of this project - including a copy of my approved proposal - and asked them to consider joining the group with the following requirements and guidelines:

- One must be willing to commit to attend the first six sessions in order to form trust and continuity
- The group would meet the first Friday of every month from 9:30am-11:30am in the Amerson House Retreat Center on the campus of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
- Each member must be willing to present a sermon that had been either audio or visually recorded and share it with the group prior to one of the sessions
- One must be open to feedback, willing to explore other styles and forms of preaching, as well as share feedback on colleague sermons heard

These brief guidelines were the only ones that were non-negotiable for priests to say yes to the group initially. Additionally, the format for these first six sessions would be as follows:

- prior to each gathering, one member would email an audio or video link to the group for each member to listen to before we gathered
- half of each session will be critiquing the sermon, giving feedback, and learning how to give feedback
- and half will be a lectionary study on an upcoming text the majority if not all of us would be preaching from in the weeks to come in our given ministry context

From the first lot of five priests I asked, three agreed. Two did not feel they could commit to the time required, so I asked two more priests who both said yes. The group of six was set, including me.

Once I had the commitment of the six of us, we could negotiate when and where we might meet since it turned out that there was over an hour distance between us. I knew the commitment was there, so now we could adjust some of those details. At our pre-Lenten clergy retreat, the six of us gathered and moved a couple of the meetings closer to two members and moved three of the meetings to days that were not our normal day off - which for most of us was Friday anyway. We also moved the last meeting to my home to include a celebration dinner afterwards. No changes were made that left anyone out - we stuck with the original time and date agreed upon in a given month if we could not find another time for us all.

These were the member, their current positions, length of ordained ministry, and formal preaching education:

The Rev. Mary Demmler - Rector, St. Mathias, Toccoa - ordained 10 years

2 preaching courses - Both at Duke - 2002, 2003

The Rev. Dick Game - Rector, St. Patrick's, Dunwoody - ordained 6 years

1 course - General with The Rev. Dr. Tom Long 2007, Candler

The Rev. Sharon Hiers - Associate, St. Bartholomew's, Atlanta - ordained 5 years

7 courses - 3 in MDiv at Sewanee 2006, 2006, 2007 - The Rev. Kathy Calore and

The Rev. Dr. William Brosend; 4 in DMin program at Sewanee - Old Testament,

Liturgical Tradition, Spirituality, and Preaching Feasts

PEP in 2006, PEP 2014

The Rev. Stuart Higginbotham - Rector, Grace, Gainesville - ordained 7 years

3 courses - Old Testament with Walter Brueggemann 2005; Homiletics with

The Rev. Dr. William Brosend 2008; Spirituality of Preaching, The Rev. Martin

Smith 2013, Sewanee

The Rev. Keith Oglesby - Rector, Holy Spirit, Cumming - ordained 6 years -

2 courses - General with The Rev. Dr. Tom Long 2007; Lectionary with The Rev.

Ted Hackett in 2009, Candler

The Rev. Liz Schellingerhoudt - Associate, St. Luke's, Atlanta - ordained 4 years -

1 course - Lectionary with The Rev. Ted Hackett in 2009, Candler

Session #1 - March 2014 - Amerson House at St. Bartholomew's, Atlanta, GA

In mid-March, we gathered for our first meeting on a Friday morning in the Amerson House at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church. We began with Morning Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer, and then spent about 20 minutes talking about my project and asking why each one of them had said yes. Dick loved the project idea and believed it was exactly what he had in mind for "sharpening the saw" as he put it. Mary mentioned, as she marked her tenth anniversary to the priesthood, she was feeling some "wear and tear" and this would be a good way to mark the time and a way of renewing her ministry, not to mention a way for her to explore a DMin for herself. Liz noted that she received little to no feedback when she preached, even though she was on a multi-clergy staff with four other preachers. She was craving some feedback on her preaching, and this was a welcomed way to receive it. Stuart has just begun a DMin, and being a part of this project was a way for him to see options for himself. Additionally, Stuart and I had been in a clergy group together and knew we worked well together and he wanted to help. Keith had recently hired a new associate and now had some additional time to focus on preaching, and was excited about this group make-up.

Having heard Stuart preach and knowing his strengths to communicate effectively, I asked him to share the first sermon (Appendix B). Stuart sent the link the Monday before we gathered, and each of us had the opportunity to listen to it, and make some notes about the sermon we heard. Stuart preaches from a written manuscript, from the pulpit. To open the discussion, I asked the group to tell Stuart what their initial overall comment was about the sermon. Dick immediately noted that he felt it was risky

because Stuart integrated a story about his daughter. For Dick, that has backfired (having three daughters) and he was invested in how it affected the family. We quickly realized that context was important, as we knew Stuart had not been in this parish long, having just been called as the rector of Grace, Gainesville. This affected his preaching as he included this personal story about his family, particularly his daughter, but had the dual yet subtle purpose of introducing her to the parish. Keith noted that returning back to the story of his daughter at the end seemed to wrap it up for him and he was left with incredible visual imagery. For me, going back to that story distracted me from the point of the sermon. I suggested Stuart might have missed his ending which for me was before returning to the story of his daughter, and the phrase "We are called to be transformed into the likeness of Christ....of all things." Finally, it was also noted that Stuart's passion is evident in his delivery, and each of us found ourselves captivated by his cadence and story-telling.

That brings me to the second question I asked our group: What was the point of the sermon? Or what is a focus sentence for the sermon? Or so what? Each one of us responded in some version of "the glory of God is accessible, is in the everyday, and cannot be contained." What made this sermon work was the heavy imagery. By using the story about Stuart's daughter chasing lightning bugs, the idea of how God's glory is in the everyday but cannot be contained was made concrete. What also worked was feeling the preacher was vulnerable to the text in that he made the connection to his spiritual understanding of how God's glory surrounds us. Finally, someone noted that

preaching connects when we remember that part of preaching is about relationships and everyday things, and Stuart offered both of those in a tangible way.

In the second hour of our time together, we engaged in a lectionary bible study for Year A, Lent 5. These specific readings were chosen based on when the majority of us would be preaching in the coming month. The gospel reading for that Sunday is the raising of Lazarus. Since many of us had just preached on the temptation stories, we noted a connection to it and wondered if Jesus had fallen to temptation. Liz also asked us to consider what this story says about God changing God's mind? Was God remorseful for not having saved Jesus? Why was he weeping? What is really happening here? We don't know for sure, of course, but all of this gave us an idea of what folks in the pews might be asking themselves. The Old Testament reading is the Valley of Dry Bones story and Stuart noted the connection between the words *humility*, *humus*, and *human*. These questions and observations gave us some starting points for what we might be called to preach on the Fifth Sunday in Lent.

Session #2 - April 2014 - Holy Spirit, Cumming, GA

We began this session by offering feedback from our first meeting together. Mary quickly noted that she was certainly much more attentive to her sermons over the last month than she had previously been. She noted "My Holy Week sermons were better for it." Stuart noted that he wished there were a way to embody the feedback such as "this is what I heard and how I used the feedback" since he was the first to be evaluated. In light of the liturgical calendar, we wondered if a little more time together before Holy Week to

study the texts might be helpful. In addition, we considered what it would be like to listen to more than one sermon of each of us from Holy Week, and offer feedback. We noted this may be a consideration either in the future, or to other groups.

In response to our lectionary study from session #1, Mary agreed to share the next sermon (Appendix C) - one she preached in her parish on Year A, Lent 5. Her sermon used the Ezekiel reading of The Valley of Dry Bones. Mary preaches without notes, from the middle of the nave - not the pulpit. Opening with imagery of sheep and a shepherd, the group concluded that the focus sentence or grounding message of the sermon was "We forget there is a shepherd, but the shepherd never forgets there is an us." Stuart noted that Mary preaches by teaching lessons with a cadence and authority that were both effective and genuine. Keith noted that her tone and modulation drew him in. She had a great opening repetition and good imagery with the sheep and shepherd. However, we as a group found the sermon a little too long. The beginning of her sermon also included reminding us of the seven deadly sins, which we noted was appropriate for a Lenten sermon. However, at over seven minutes into the sermon, Mary turned to the dry bones story to note how all hope was lost as we had wandered so far from where we were supposed to be. She then turned to a story of a friend, a veteran and an addict who had to visit a morgue to identify a relative, and how he felt God close to him in that ordeal. All of these images were good and appropriate for the occasion, however there was such an abundance of darkness and death, that the good news could not come fast enough. And it was almost too late when she finally made the turn. And while it was a positive message, one of how we are never outside of the reach of God's loving embrace, and emphasizing

the real point of resurrected life, it felt too late, and too ancillary. I wanted a little more hope after such darkness and wandering and sinfulness. Ultimately, Mary crafted a fine sermon, with one topic, seasonally appropriate. She was grateful for our comments and felt like she would really take this feedback and use it going forward.

Session #3 - May 2014 - Holy Spirit, Cumming, GA

Our third group meeting was held in the outdoor gazebo on the grounds of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit in Cumming, GA on May 20, 2014. In addition to the six members of the group being in attendance, we also had The Rev. Dr. Bill Brosend, Homiletics professor from The School of Theology, with us. As my advisor and first reader on this project, he took the initiative to attend one of the sessions. I found this extremely helpful as Dr. Brosend was both encouraging and supportive, but not directly influencing the discussion unless asked. What I also found helpful was his comments from the preached sermon, after having heard him give comments to sermons preached in the classroom. It further emphasized his style and what he listens for and notices in a sermon.

Liz was our preacher for this session, and we listened to a sermon (Appendix D) she preached on Good Friday at St. Luke's where she currently serves. The Good Friday service is a three hour liturgy, from 12 noon to three in the afternoon, reflecting on the seven last words of Christ. Liz gave a sermon after the second scripture reading. I started this session by asking Liz to give some feedback and reflection on when she preached this sermon, and how she felt about it. Liz does not like this service. She notes

that she struggles with atonement theology, and said this service to her feels flat, albeit somber and serious. Interestingly, after she noted this, most of us in the group said we could sense her discomfort as we listened to the sermon. While the content was good, her delivery was deeply distressed, and on Good Friday that may or may not be appropriate. I noted to Liz that I was hungry for a pause in this sermon, to reflect on some good content, and she responded by saying "I was in a hurry. I felt like I was taking up people's time, because I didn't like having to preach this sermon."

At the end of this discussion, I invited Dr. Brosend to comment on our reflections or if he might want to say anything to Liz. His response was "Liz, preach more." In her context, Liz preaches about six times a year, once every other month. Dr. Brosend encouraged her to engage it more, seek out more opportunities, try and find ways to be more comfortable with the art, as well as the content. Liz was deeply grateful for the feedback. She is discouraged that in her current position, even with five clergy on staff, she rarely hears any real feedback on her preaching, even when she asks for it. There may be much more going on here for her, of course, but it was important to note that we heard her struggling from the pulpit, and she was surprised to know it was so obvious. Whether that was her discomfort with the Good Friday service or a more general projection as a whole, when we reflected it back to her, she was surprised and grateful. She said "Having a place to talk about this and be intentional about preaching is invaluable."

The second half of our session was focused on a lectionary study on the scripture texts appointed for the seventh Sunday of Easter, since most of us would be preaching

that day. As a whole, we gravitated toward the Acts reading of Jesus' ascension. Only two of the six of us would have services on Ascension Day, so this Sunday would be spent talking about it. Stuart told a very funny and descriptive story about Ascension, and we started to imagine what images we might use for this sermon. In our discussion about the gospel, a few things were observed: Jesus is hard to follow, and he talks about himself in the third person which is just odd; Jesus is protecting the gathered community, but from what? There was also discussion about how sometimes it is helpful to simply name what it is we are struggling with in a text, because it is likely that others are too - and it is liberating for them and for us.

Session #4 - July 11, 2014 - Amerson House at St. Bartholomew's, Atlanta, GA

As the group settled into our time together, Mary made this statement: "I have really been looking forward to our gathering today, even on my day off." This was the overall sentiment of each member, as we gathered on a Friday morning, which for most of us is our regular day off of work. Liz noted that it was two-fold in having a common topic to gather around in our preaching, but also that there is a genuine caring about each other. To be supportive in our preaching is to care about how we are spreading the gospel, doing what we are called to do, and wanting to serve God through this gift as best as possible. This session felt a bit like a turning point, in that we then did a brief check-in with each other to offer specific support for each other's ministries. We are becoming a clergy group who have a defined focus, and for many of us this was a first!

Dick was our preacher for this session, and we had listened to his sermon (Appendix E) from July 6 - Year A, Proper 9. The gospel reading for the day included: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." This was the focus scripture for Dick's sermon, primarily the last sentence about yokes and what it means for Jesus' yoke to be easy.

Mary noted how affective his imagery was around the yoke that hung on the wall of the farmhouse his grandparents lived in. She noted his ability to craft the scene, and that she could picture it, feel it and even smell it. The group on a whole concurred that this image was very strong and kept the sermon focused on one topic. Liz notes that his delivery also helped, that his voice is calming, and she felt relaxed in the idea of Jesus' yoke.

In contrast, the group observed the sermon had too many images, and was probably too long. Dick used four images in this sermon, and all of them were experiences from his life that felt a bit overdone. Two or even the one we all gravitated toward would have been much more effective. One of us even remarked that we never really heard the third image because the first two were sufficient and so rich. By the fourth example, we as a group realized that we were distracted from the gospel and Dick's primary message, and encouraged him to turn more fully to his proclamation sooner.

As our group turned to our lectionary study time, an interesting thing happened. We began the discussion by talking about the text for Sunday (two days away), and the parable of the sower. One member (who, due to confidentiality, will remain unnamed) was in the midst of a very difficult time in their marriage and this week had really been a deep source of pain. This person felt safe enough in this clergy group to express the struggle, even without great detail. What was interesting was this member was to preach Sunday, and was wrestling with how to proclaim the gospel in a time when “good news” seemed so far out of reach. In fact perceiving that what they heard in the parable was “three out of four chances we are going to be failures...” After a very pastoral and caring response, the conversation turned to how we preach when we don’t feel or can’t hear the good news for ourselves. What are our options?

For those who are the only priests in their parish, in this very rare circumstance, they have found that short sermons including a story help keep the good news present in the midst of personal trials. One person shared that sometimes you have to ask the associate, or have been asked as the associate, even if it is late notice. The suggestion to our fellow priest in that moment was to ask the seminarian, who could always say no if it wasn’t possible, but having this option available and choosing it, may in fact be the most pastoral response the priest could offer to their people. Our colleague, empowered by the group, took this option, even stepped out and made the phone call and received a positive response from the seminarian. Then, the expression of relief and deep gratitude for our group was overwhelming. This was a new and unexpected gift of having our clergy

mentor group for preaching. And in fact, we noted that the Holy Spirit was surely at work in giving us Dick's sermon and Jesus' yoke being easy!

Session #5 - August 5, 2014 - Holy Spirit, Cumming, GA

For our fifth session, I was the preacher and offered a sermon (Appendix F) given on July 27 - Year A, Proper 12. The epistle reading was from Romans 8, and the sermon focused on this verse: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." There was also reference to the gospel and Jesus' attempt to explain, notably confusingly so, what the kingdom of heaven is like, trying to use words. Stuart noted that this sermon was a contemplative experience without using the word contemplative, which was very effective. They also noted the pauses and silences in a sermon about being present and not always needing words was helpful. The group liked the imagery and concrete ways in which the sermon reminded us being present speaks volumes, recognizing that language may be limiting.

As the preacher, I notice the wrestling with a sermon about using less words, and needing words for a sermon! This sermon seemed "unfinished" to me, as if there was more to say, but that in fact would have been contrary to what the sermon was about in the first place. I found it uncomfortable to share it with the group, in that they have taken a bit of a default stance to me being the "expert" in the group. It was good for me as the convener of our clergy group on preaching to remind them that while I may have a broader knowledge and understanding based on experience and study of what makes a

sermon “good” based on my DMin work alone, I did not consider myself an expert preacher, yet I do recognize my experience and formation as a mentor is greater because of this project. Part of doing this project is to recognize where I need help in my sermon writing too, and being safe to explore and struggle with getting this very important word(Word) out.

There is so much that makes a sermon “good” and in my context at St. Bartholomew’s, part of that is that parishioners appreciate the length of my sermons, and my ability to annunciate and speak clearly. This is, of course, a reaction to the other preachers in the parish, but also I am aware of how often folks can tell me something from a sermon. Wrestling with preaching is never going to go away, and this group is helping me to also receive the very necessary feedback I need to be a more effective preacher.

As we attempted to turn again to a lectionary study, one member of the group asked about seasonal preaching and wedding and funeral preaching, and what resources we use for these situations. Does anyone ever do a series of preaching on consecutive texts? Mary noted that she has done this and it worked very effectively, because her parishioners noted how each week built on the next. We spent the rest of the time brainstorming how our group might ultimately turn into different series of preaching - including ideas like focusing on Holy Week texts (mentioned before), or wedding and funeral preaching, or preaching the season of Advent, for instance. For the second session in a row, we did not get to a lectionary study of an upcoming text. I observed that perhaps this was a telling place where this project was learning what preachers might

need instead of lectionary study. Some of us do that already in other contexts, so maybe we need something different. No conclusions were drawn at this point, but it was noted that something different than a lectionary study may be more desirable and effective in clergy mentor preaching groups.

Session #6 - September 23, 2014 - Residence of Sharon Hiers, Decatur, GA

For our sixth and last group gathering on this project, we met at my home, with plans to have dinner together afterwards as a thank you and celebration of our time. We began this session as we had the rest, discussing the sermon we had listened to during the week. Keith was our preacher, and shared a sermon (Appendix G) from August 10, Year A - Proper 14. It was the epistle that he preached on, from Romans 10:5-15, focusing on “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord.” Keith preached a sermon dealing with control, stress, and our confession of Jesus is Lord and the grace that offers. His closing line included: “Jesus is Lord not me. That job has been taken.”

Keith is a very good storyteller. He preaches from notes but not in the pulpit and his stories are vivid. Keith also has a very strong relationship with his congregation, and there is interplay with his listeners in his sermons. He is extremely relatable, and preached a sermon that is accessible, can be connected to, and brings us back to Jesus again and again. The group noted all of these points about Keith in his preaching.

However, we also noted that there may have been too many stories. He had four or five examples, certainly not needing them all, but further, they were examples of how we are not in control. I would have traded three of them for one example of how

confessing Jesus is Lord helps us to release our need for control, which was his ultimate point. We noted that one of the stories, about his corporate life, was distracting and we did not think it was necessary. It was also too abstract, and while it may have resonated with some, it seemed superfluous. I asked Keith directly this question: “How does the confession that “Jesus is Lord” play out at Holy Spirit? What does that look like?” His response was “It plays out better since I have been there. It is better received, and part of our common life.”

In talking about Keith’s sermon, three things emerged that were helpful for our last time together. First, Mary noted that having this time together, helped us to know each other and hear our sermons with a personal connection. This may help a clergy mentor group as we are more able to listen like our parishioners that know us more intimately. We observed that a second year together would certainly open us up to hear each others preaching in a new, deeper way. This surfaced as we listened to a story about Keith and his daughters in his sermon, and noted that since we had heard him talk about them over the months, the stories seemed easier to connect to.

Second, I asked why we tell stories in our sermons. Here’s the variety of responses from the group:

- Because it is not a lecture
- To give relevance to the scripture
- Makes a sermon less didactic
- Relates to everyday life
- Take it “off the shelf”
- Relates to the parish
- Let’s them know some about us

This stirred a real discussion among us including how and when and why we tell stories, and whose stories we tell. When do we reveal something about ourselves, and when does it tend toward narcissism? Do we tell stories about our spouses? Our children? We didn't always agree on these questions, yet it was a great way to step back and talk about our preaching, and specifically story telling. We did agree that if the only thing someone remembered was the story and they missed the point, we needed to re-evaluate our reasons.

This led to a third, and important discussion for our last gathering. The conversation around storytelling in sermons had a lot of energy in it. I mentioned that over the past two sessions, we had lost energy around our lectionary study. Since many of us do a lectionary study in other groups, or with our parishioners, or other staff members, some suggested that what might be more helpful for the second half of a clergy mentor group on preaching would be something broader. A few suggestions were regarding styles of preaching, book studies about preaching, or topics that affect our preaching. Someone also suggested using the second half of these gatherings to listen to either "notable" preachers or recent sermons we heard that we thought were especially good, or not, and discussing why we thought so. I asked about the format of one sermon per group member per month, and if we could do two instead. The group unanimously agreed that one from us a month was the right balance, and that listening or watching a second one together from someone outside the group then discussing it would be how they would like to proceed.

Before we departed for our celebratory dinner, the group decided to take a break from our monthly gatherings - partly because of my need to make some conclusions about this part of the project - but there was also a strong desire to reconvene in the new year with the format noted above. While I offered for anyone else to take the mantle of getting us back together, they asked me to continue to do it, and felt they had learned a great deal from my leadership. I have happily agreed to do so, and we will likely gather again in the Spring of 2015 for another six month stretch.

One unexpected outcome of this pilot program and project was having the opportunity to share it with three different groups of priests, made possible through Dr. Brosend's encouragement and connections. The first group was from the Diocese of Olympia. After being introduced by Dr. Brosend through email, we spoke by phone regarding how to set up a peer group. The second group was the result of a lunch meeting arranged by Dr. Brosend at the PEP/PEP II with four preachers representing the dioceses of Michigan, Western Massachusetts, Ohio and Atlanta. After explaining the steps I had taken to start a mentoring groups, I realized it was time to create a "how to" guide to help these other groups get started. Appendix H is the first draft of that guide. Finally, during the Advanced Degree Program at Sewanee, Dr. Brosend invited me to explain the pilot program to my fellow classmates. As a result, four students asked me to send them more information - one being a Methodist from Tennessee, and the other three from the following dioceses: West Texas, Eastern North Carolina, and Fond du Lac. Sharing my work with others has been a very exciting part of this project for me. It

further highlights the yearning preachers have to hone their skills, gain more experiences and exposure, and have support from fellow clergy specifically on the topic of preaching.

Step Four: The Survey - Preaching Experience, Feedback Methods, & Resources

To fully understand the efficacy of peer mentor preaching groups and to expand and share resources among preachers, some research was done to learn popular practices. Initially, it began by surveying the current Doctor of Ministry in Preaching students at Sewanee; eight participants responded. Because it was such a small sample, I decided to broaden the landscape and invited clergy from the Diocese of Atlanta, through our closed Facebook group, to participate as well. As a result, I received over 50 responses to the poll.

While the questions were not exhaustive or of scientific design, it yielded some interesting information for this project. The survey, Appendix I, looked at the experience of the preacher, the number of formal preaching classes the respondent had attended, including seminary, what the most common methods were of continued growth in preaching, satisfaction with their preaching ability, willingness to join a peer mentor preaching group, current favorite preaching resources and commentaries, and what one thing they believed would help them preach more effectively.

The survey, found in detail in Appendix J, provided a tremendous amount of insight for this project. What follows is a summary of those results. First, 42% of those who engaged the survey had 5-10 years of preaching experience. This statistic emphasizes the idea that peer mentoring in preaching may be most effective for priests in

this range, but by no means should be considered exclusively. This was the range of experience I sought out for the pilot group, and I was deeply aware that the six preachers who participated were energetic about renewing our passion for preaching.

In regards to the amount of formal preaching classes, the results indicated that 42% of preachers polled had 2 or less formal classes in preaching. Interestingly, four of the six (67%) in the pilot group fell in this same category. It should also be highlighted that some responders are in the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program at Sewanee so these numbers reflect priests who are taking initiative to further their preaching education and experience.

An astounding 81% of responders indicated listening to sermons as their “go to” method for improving their preaching, making it by far the most popular method. However, there is no mention of discussing these sermons with others. Reading books on preaching/sermons was the second method most used (65%) but again that may be in a vacuum as well, if no conversation is had otherwise.

Sixteen preachers, 31%, said they have been a part of a clergy peer group specifically tailored to preaching and/or sermons. While this percentage seems high, again, keep in mind that five of the respondents are in my group for this project, and eight of the respondents are in the DMin in Preaching program at Sewanee which likely raises this number.

Only 34 of the 58 preachers responded to the question regarding the types of formal or organized feedback received. This lower number is likely due to the fact that it was a free-form question and required more time for a response. Further, many of the

responses remarked that feedback is not formal of any kind, rather, informal conversations between a parishioner and the preacher regarding the sermon. Multiple preachers, 11 out of the 34, responded that they have received no formal or organized feedback since seminary. The most popular type of response was preachers asking parishioners, rectors, or vestry members to write comments regarding a specific sermon or meet with the preacher and provide verbal feedback. There were, of course, five responses based on this project's clergy peer group.

While 45 of 58 responders marked they agreed with the statement: **I am satisfied with my preaching abilities**, and another five strongly agreed, an astounding 54 of these 58 noted they would benefit from more feedback on their preaching. Possibly one of the most important statistics from this survey was this: 50 preachers, 87% of the responders, noted they would be willing to be a part of clergy group on preaching. The harvest is plenty!

In the category of preaching resources, there was a wide variety of responses. See Appendix K for all the responses. Below, are the most common ones, noted multiple times (#):

- Feasting on the Word (18)
- Text Week (18)
- Working Preacher (15)
- Commentaries (15)
- Newspapers/Current events/NYT/WSJ (10)
- Bible (11)
- The New Interpreters Bible Commentary (9)
- Homiletic magazines (8)

- Websites(7)
- Greek (5)
- Frederick Buechner (5)
- Prayer (4)
- Poetry (4)
- Girardian Reflections on the Lectionary (3)
- blueletterbible.org (3)
- Bible study (2)
- ATLA (2)
- Informal discussion with other clergy (2)
- Seminary class notes (2)
- Sermons of others (2)
- Hebrew (2)
- Pop culture (2)

Per the request of a number of responders to the survey, I have shared this list with the Clergy Facebook group. Sharing our resources with one another in hopes we may all be more effective witnesses through our preaching and proclamation of Jesus Christ is an additional unseen benefit of this project

Finally, of the 55 responders to the statement **Name one thing you believe would help you preach more effectively**, the top three responses written over and over again were:

- More time - to read, to write, to prepare, to reflect, to craft
- Feedback - formally and consistently
- Working with other preachers and/or a local clergy preaching group

This survey showed the deep desire preachers have to become more effective in the craft, and the realization that a clergy peer mentor group is both possible and desirable.

Step Five: Evaluation of the Pilot Project

The sixth and final meeting of the pilot peer mentor group was in September. Before we parted, I asked the participants for verbal feedback and/or any reflections on these six sessions. Liz noted the format and structure was exactly what she needed and she suggested not making any changes in it - it worked great for her. She also noted that my work of learning to be a mentor was effective and helpful; bringing in points and questions she never would have thought of otherwise. Mary noted she had experienced an overall increase -in general mindfulness about her preaching, and she never felt there was “one right way” but was invited to explore other ways to be more effective. She felt supported and guided through this entire process. Keith added it felt natural, not forced, easy. Dick appreciated the group, even observing, “I found myself as a preacher” and so often now he asks himself “where is this sermon going to carry people?” He also discerned that hearing other’s preaching styles excited him to explore new ways. For example, Mary’s preaching without notes interested him in trying that too. Finally, the group discussed sharing a reading list of all the books mentioned during our time together, this can be found in Appendix L, and includes books suggested to me by my mentor, Dr. Bill Brosend. As a group, we decided to take a little time away to discover and use what we had learned over the past several months

After a couple months, I checked back in with my peers. Through email correspondence, I asked each member to: send me, in the next day or two, your thoughts on this statement as written in the project’s proposal: **"The primary goal [of this**

project] is to renew a preachers commitment and desire to preach and help the priest grow in their skills for preaching.” I emphasized that any response is helpful and just a few sentences to a couple of paragraphs on how this project did or did not accomplish this goal would be super.”

The depth of their responses were astounding. It is remarkable that from their vantage point, the goal of this project was met, and more so. Here is what I received, from each member of this group.

Stuart Higginbotham

“I agree wholeheartedly with the sentence, with this being the goal for the project. And, I see two factors inherent in your statement: one is to renew the preacher’s commitment and desire. The other is to look at skills, how to cultivate these skills and tools within our vocation (with preaching being one of the most substantial—and visible—aspects of our vocation). I want to focus specifically on the first factor. With the yearning to renew the commitment and desire, I loved our times together because they helped encourage and challenge me to reclaim some of the depth of spiritual imagination I lose so easily. *Sharing times with colleagues helps nurture and challenge me to step out of my complacency.* I experience complacency in my own vocation like a smoke that creeps in under a door...it soon fills the room and I become comfortable with where I am. And, when I am not open to growth, I know this impacts my congregation. Cultivating this sense of spiritual imagination within preaching is essential for me. What ways can I look at the text anew? What have I overlooked?

Also, Cynthia Park [Stuart’s associate] and I were talking about our working relationship here, and I thought of our group. In the Jewish tradition, there is a highly regarded custom to study the texts in pairs. Often, you are assigned, to make sure you don’t just “get” someone who will only encourage your point of view. But these pairs meet, read the texts together, argue them, debate them, challenge each other to see imaginative ways of understanding them... They do midrash together—never alone.

This was an enormous strength of the group—of any preaching group. What if we reclaimed this sensibility and practice of cultivating spiritual imagination within textual studies and preaching? You are doing this!! And I love it....”

Liz Schellingerhoudt

“The project was a success to me for several reasons. First, it is very rare to receive constructive feedback about a sermon. Too often, we get short-sentence accolades or comments on our sermons, maybe requests for copies, but very little in-depth conversation about the content, theology, style of preaching, what worked/didn’t work, etc. We certainly never receive constructive feedback about how to improve our preaching. We put a lot of thought, time and energy into preaching and rarely hear how it is received. Second, the project created a safe space for receiving feedback. Even in multi-staff parishes, we receive very little feedback from other preachers. There is a competitiveness amongst clergy that is very normal, but means that a safe space has to be intentionally created and nurtured for us to feel safe to both receive and offer meaningful feedback.

Hope this helps – I miss everyone and would love to get together soon.”

Keith Oglesby

“The main benefits of the group to me were to meet with peers to hear their sermons and then get the group's impressions on what worked and did not work for them. There were no universal answers, but good insights to be aware of as a preacher. For example, in Stuart's first sermon we heard, the feedback I remember is whether or not the return to the firefly story at the end of the sermon was helpful. There is not a right or wrong answer in method, but it is helpful to hear different perspectives and be aware that is going on in the congregation.

Our time together has reinforced how important preaching is and how much we need each other's support to do good and faithful work. I am grateful for the experience and look forward to what comes next.”

Mary Demmler

“I think the project certainly is meeting this goal. First, the ability to have colleagues listen to and critique my sermons is invaluable. Often parishioners give us typical feedback, and usually all positive or they don’t say anything at all. They also hear us preach nearly every Sunday and cease to have “fresh ears”, as it were, to be able to provide valuable feedback. Also, they often don’t know how to offer critiques or comments. Working with colleagues gives me an audience that is knowledgeable and experienced in the field of homiletics and has more than sufficient theological training to offer insights and challenges. They have studied the texts preached upon recently and

so can consider what came to their minds as they prepared their own sermons. I imagine that the longer the same group meets, the deeper and more valuable the comments and critiques will become.

Listening to others preach with an intentional ear also has been helpful. I rarely get to hear other preachers unless I listen to podcasts online and most of the times those are not friends and immediate colleagues. It is refreshing and renewing to hear how someone whose theology, opinion, and perspective I value has looked at a text and interpreted it. It helps keep the text alive for me and engages me in a way that otherwise would not be available to me.”

One of the desired outcomes of this project was the hope that some if not all of the members of this pilot group might start their own groups based on their experience. The ripple effect could have had deep ramifications in the spreading of this sort of preaching feedback. However, the group unanimously pushed back on this idea, at least for now, primarily because the group felt like a bond and connection had been formed that would allow us to go deeper with each other. The trust and willingness to learn together would be strengthened with an additional six months. While I still have hopes that at some point at least one or two of the participants might begin their own groups - even if the two that live further, but closer to each other started a group together - for now, I am grateful these preachers will continue to meet and strive to be more effective preachers!

Step 6: Conclusion and Justification of the Need for this Project

On Christmas Eve, 2014, I heard one of the most profound sermons I had ever heard. The preacher eloquently yet accessibly named the many emotions that Christmas

evokes for people, and talked about lists. Lists of the things that we want versus the list of things we need, and how these lists get smaller over time, as we realize what is really important in life. At just over nine minutes into the sermon, I looked around and people were gently nodding and tears were quietly resonating with what the preacher had shared. And then he took a deep breath. And for the next nine minutes, the preacher talked about Julian of Norwich, and Augustus, and read a poem, and talked about a play. And by the end of it, people were fidgeting, and looked disinterested, and checking their midnight watches.

Some thirty years prior, I later learned, the preacher was taught in a class in seminary that the only way to preach was to bring in lots of outside resources so people would believe and connect to what he had to say. And in those thirty years, the preacher neither pursued nor received any other way of preaching. To his credit, sometimes it works really well. And sometimes, like a Christmas Eve midnight worship, eighteen minutes is too long, and we believed him whole-heartedly when he spoke from his whole-heart.

Clergy mentor groups around preaching can be deeply helpful to priests as we sort through everything from style to theology to delivery. I spent this year learning to be mentor, observing a variety of skilled preaching mentors, working with my colleagues, and asking questions to come to a firm conclusion that clergy mentor groups on preaching could vastly affect our desire and thus quality of preaching. The enthusiasm with which the members of this group came together to talk about preaching was

palpable. While there is certainly a need for a commitment to the group, every session left the members wanting more.

We need to try this on a wider scale, where priests are now, and over a broad period of time. I believe it has improved my own preaching, and I hear from parishioners as well as colleagues of those in my preaching group that this has made a difference. We must not take this task lightly, as it is often some of the few words of hope that people hear in a given week - and that hope is Jesus Christ. We, as preachers, must do everything we can to find new ways to remind people. As the Letter to Hebrews tells us:

We want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul...⁹

Step 7: The Product - Implementing and Mentoring a Preaching Peer Group

In the proposal for this project, one of the products was to produce an outline or first draft of a document exploring a way to implement a preaching mentor's group to fellow clergy. With the information from the members of this small group, the preaching mentors at PEP II, and both current classmates focused on a DMin in preaching at Sewanee and fellow priests in the Diocese of Atlanta, here is a first draft of concrete ways for someone to get started with a group, and help each other grow in our preaching.

⁹Hebrews 6:11-12, 19a

The Outline

Recently, a pilot project in the Diocese of Atlanta explored the efficacy of a clergy peer mentor group on preaching. The primary goals was to renew a preachers commitment and desire to preach and help the priest grow in their skills for preaching.

Here are some of the comments from the pilot group members who participated:

“First, the ability to have colleagues listen to and critique my sermons is invaluable. It is refreshing and renewing to hear how someone whose theology, opinion, and perspective I value has looked at a text and interpreted it. I helps keep the text alive for me and engages me in a way that otherwise would not be available to me.”- The Rev. Mary Demmler

“Our time together has reinforced how important preaching is and how much we need each other's support to do good and faithful work. I am grateful for the experience and look forward to what comes next.” - The Rev. Keith Oglesby

“Sharing times with colleagues helps nurture and challenge me to step out of my complacency. I experience complacency in my own vocation like a smoke that creeps in under a door...it soon fills the room and I become comfortable with where I am. Cultivating this sense of spiritual imagination within preaching is essential for me. This was an enormous strength of the group... What if we reclaimed this sensibility and practice of cultivating spiritual imagination within textual studies and preaching? You are doing this!! And I love it....” - The Rev. Stuart Higginbotham

Here you will find the ways to get a group of your own started. Also included are ways to mentor, to approach the conversations so that it opens the door to feedback. What you learn and glean, how your grow will evolved with each session.

Step One - Forming a group

- ✦ Identify four to five priests with some geographical connection, ideally that have been ordained between 5-10 years.

- * Email them with your idea of starting a peer mentor group to explore and develop preaching skills together.
- * Consider this criteria:
 - * One must be willing to commit to attend the first six sessions to start
 - * Identify the location and time that each group will meet
 - * Each member must be willing to present a sermon that has been either audio or visually recorded and shared with the group prior to one of the session
 - * One must be open to feedback, and willing to explore other styles and forms of preaching
 - * Conclude the email asking the recipient to consider your invitation and pray about it. Ask to know their initial thoughts, and if this is something they may be interested in. If so, wonderful. If not, that is good and faithful, and you can ask someone else
 - * Once you have a total of between 4-6 members you are ready to start

Step Two - The Format of Group Sessions

- * In the week prior to a session, one member of the group is asked to share a video or audio of a preached sermon for the rest of the members to hear.
- * The session length was most effective at 2 1/2 hours total in length.
- * Begin with prayer - the Daily Office if possible

- * Then, the first half of your time together is spent on discussing the sermon heard, offering critique and feedback, and mentoring the group in dialogue. (Suggest ways of doing this are offered in the next section.)
- * After a break, the second half of your time together may be spend in a variety of ways, and may evolve or change over time. Some suggestions are:
 - * a lectionary study on an upcoming text or occasion individuals will be preaching on
 - * listen to a sermon by a notable preacher, or one that a group member had heard they would like to discuss, and then offer critique and feedback on why it was or was not an effective sermon
 - * discuss an article or book related to preaching
 - * read a sermon, a midrash, or a story and discuss the imagery, the strengths and weaknesses
 - * discuss a piece of poetry
 - * or some mixture of these ideas - or something of you own!

Some suggestions on mentoring

To get the conversation started around the sermon, here are some suggested ways to start:

Questions/comments directed to preacher:

- How did the sermon feel to preach?
- Anything you would have done any differently?
- What blew your mind about this sermon?

- What would you do differently?
- What did you want people to know or do from the sermon?
- What are you trying to do to or for your parishioners?

Questions/comments directed to others:

- What was the focus sentence?
- What were you called to do or feel or remember?
- What image did you walk away with? What does this image do for you in your call as a Christian?
- Was there anything that didn't work? Was distracting? Left you unsettled in a way that wasn't mean to be unsettling?
- What drew you into the sermon?
- How was the delivery?
- What more do you want from this sermon? What do you want less of?

The single most important thing about a clergy peer mentor group in preaching is to remember why we are preaching in the first place. With this reminder in focus, and discussing our art in community, we will constantly be renewed for this beautiful gift and privilege.

APPENDIX A

PROJECT TIMELINE 2014-2015

January 8, 2014 - Met with Dr. Brosend for project proposal discussion

February 5 - Third and final draft of project proposal submitted and approved

March 14 - Group meeting #1

March 28 - Class in Sewanee with Dr. Brosend #1

April 4 - Class in Sewanee with Dr. Brosend #2

April 11 - Class in Sewanee with Dr. Brosend #3

April 22 - Group meeting #2

April 25 - Class in Sewanee with Dr. Brosend #4

May 20 - Group meeting #3 with Dr. Bill Brosend in attendance May 25-30 - PEP/PEP II

June 9-27 - ADP in Sewanee including Preaching Feasts with Dr. Brosend & Dr. Winner

July 11 - Group meeting #4

August 5 - Group meeting #5

September 23 - Group meeting #6 and celebratory dinner

September 30 - Brief presentation on this work at D of A clergy retreat

November - Survey distributed to DMin & D of A clergy: "Why Do You Preach Like That?"

January 15, 2015 - Submit first draft of project paper to advisor/first reader (Dr. Bill Brosend)

March 1 - Submit revised draft of project paper to second reader (Dr. Lauren Winner)

APPENDIX B

The Transfiguration of “Lightnin’ Bugs”

The Rev. Stuart Craig Higginbotham

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A (Transfiguration)

Exodus: 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9

March 2, 2014

Listen while you read: Audio Player

https://gracechurchgainesville.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/030214_gh.mp3

I loved those childhood Summer nights back in Arkansas. We would go to ballgames at the local park, and afterward, sometimes, we would stay to play on the field. The coaches would turn the lights off, and we would run and play by the light of the moon and stars.

The nights would get cooler as we ran and played our normal childhood games, but, sometimes, we would see them. On some nights, a few might appear toward the edge of the field and work their way over. We loved when they showed up. We would run over to them, wanting to see them up close. They were small and hard to see at night, but we would focus our eyes to see where they were. There, after our eyes had settled into the darkness around us, we were drawn to them—surprised—each time their lights blinked on, first one, then a few. On lucky nights, we would suddenly find ourselves surrounded by their miraculous glow, as we stood still and watched the lightening bugs swirl all around us. On lucky nights, we would experience magic...

People throughout time have sought after Divine experiences. There seems to be, within us, this pull, this urge, this yearning, to experience the Divine—to be in the presence of the Holy, of the Something More.

The Greeks would go to the Temple at Delphi, where the oracle would enter her trance and share insights that the people believed were messages from the gods.

The Maya believed that great pools were doorways into the Spirit Realm—as did the Celtic people, who placed wonderful offerings into the pools which we still discover today in the bogs.

Countless cultures have had their particular version of the shaman, or the priest, the one who seems to stand in the middle of the Divine and the community—bringing messages of one type or another.

There is, within us this yearning to experience the Presence, to behold what Rudolf Otto called that *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—the mysterious and tremendous mystery.

For Peter, James and John, it just snuck up on them. I picture them in my own imagination, as Jesus comes up to them and asks, “Feel like taking a walk with me?”

“Sure,” Peter says. “Why not?”

“Great,” Jesus says. “Let’s grab James and John and see if they want to go.”

And, off they go, as Jesus leads them up what the text calls “a high mountain.”

And, then it just happens. No warning. No opening prayer. Jesus didn’t stand and raise his hands and say “The Lord be with you.” They didn’t respond, “And also with you.” There was no preparation at all. It just happened. Right then and there, the text says, “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

What must have Peter and James and John thought at that moment?!

And, then there was more!

“Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.”

What. Is. Going. On!

What would you have done? What would you have said? Something that wouldn’t be polite on Sunday morning?! I can think of a few choice words that might have come across my lips!

What. Is. Going. On! What do we do? What do we say? Is anyone else seeing this? Is this real?

Peter says what I think is so honest. “Lord, it is good that we are here with you. I will make three dwellings: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Yes. That seems good. That’s reasonable. That’s what we need to do, right? Let’s organize it. Yes. Oh, I want this to stay this way. Don’t you? Yes. Let’s do this: let’s get our minds around this. We need to study it. We’re going to need more time. Others are going to want to know what happened here, and we have to be able to show them something.

And then it happened again. Something was happening: where did this cloud come from? This brightness! I can’t see! My eyes! What’s that sound? Who is saying that?? What? Yes...your beloved Son...you’re pleased... Why is all the hair on the back of my neck standing up? Everything is all warm and.....the light.....What are we going to do?

And then it was over. Just like that. The light turned off. It was dark again. Back to normal.

Jesus walks over and says what Jesus and the angels always say when God has knocked someone’s socks off: “Be not afraid.” Yeah, right. Too late for that!

And, when Peter, James and John open their eyes, they see.....just Jesus. Standing there. Normal.

What just happened? And Jesus says what must be the most sensible thing at that moment: “Best not to tell anybody about this, don’t you think?”

Yes...that’s a good idea. How could we ever describe this anyway...what happened to us? What would we say?

We would always try to catch the lightening bugs. We would find paper cups that were lying around and work to scoop the little light givers up and put them in our cup. We would hold our hands over the cup on the ride home, until we could put them into mason

jars with small holes poked in the top. And, we would put grass in the bottom of the jar, because, well, lightening bugs must like grass. We wanted to hold on to the light, take it home, show our friends and family, watch them fly around while we went to sleep. We wanted the magic close at hand.

But, it never really failed that the next day we would wake up and find them...not blinking anymore. Some of them weren't moving so much, and others weren't moving at all. It was different. Why wasn't the light shining?

I don't know how to define what *transfiguration* means. I don't know how to define what it means that Jesus metamorphed—was transmorgaphied—right there in front of Peter, James and John's eyes. I don't know how to define that they beheld God's glory. I don't know how to **define** that. But I know when it's happened in my life, and I know that you're all thinking of moments in your life that fit the bill quite nicely too.

Sometimes it's best not to try to overly define things, just to be there and let them happen. Be grateful when they sneak up on us.

It's interesting: the word used in the Exodus text today to describe what Moses saw when he, too, experienced the glory of the Lord revealed on a mountaintop, that word means, of all things, **heaviness**. Moses was surrounded by something that the Hebrew ancients, the writers who recorded that experience, could only describe as...heaviness. There was a heaviness that descended upon him, a bright cloud of light....a Presence...

It got heavy on top of the mountain.

It got real.

And Moses, and Peter, and James and John were forever changed by that brush with heaviness.

We are changed in those heavy moments as well...those times when we find our eyes suddenly squinting from a light that comes from somewhere. Or, when we suddenly get a glimpse of what must be nothing less than the Divine Presence—when we know that it is real. That God is real. That Love is real. That we are sometimes given glimpses of grace in ways we could never have imagined. That we are, somehow, for some reason, called to share in that Divine Life....that, **we** are invited to be transformed into the very likeness of Christ! **WE!**

Heaviness...

She was six years old. We went back to the main campus at Sewanee to print out a paper for my doctorate classes. I was in a hurry to get back to our apartment to work on things. But, she had other plans. I relented, and, as Lisa and I walked hand in hand, we looked across the lawn by the chapel and saw our daughter running and dancing with lightening bugs.

APPENDIX C

Transcript of sermon preached by The Rev. Mary Demmler
Year A, Lent 5
St. Matthias Episcopal Church, Toccoa, GA

How do we get so far from where we began, so far from where we are meant to be? How do we get so far from where we began and so far from where we are meant to be? We have a great shepherd for a reason because we so much are like sheep. One of the ways we get so far from where we are meant to be is pure distraction and lack of attention. We are like sheep, we are wandering through the pasture and we see “there’s some green grass over there” and we sort of meander over, nibbling our way and the shepherd is behind us and we think “Oh, he won’t mind if I go a few steps more.” But then we get to that grass and then we see some more, “Oh, I’m going to go over there, that looks delicious.” We kind of meander over, not really paying attention and then the shepherd is a little farther behind us but that’s okay, it’s alright, he is still within eyesight. “Oh, what’s that I smell...Oh, that’s delicious” and we kind of meander a little further away and pretty soon we forget there even is a shepherd and we only see the grass. That wonderful, delicious grass; and for every patch we hit there is another all the more delicious and wonderful. We get distracted in our spiritual journey, we forget to pay attention. We forget that the life of faith is a life of intentionality, that it takes focus and effort to continuously touch base with our shepherd; to always turn and look behind us and check in with the one who leads us, the one who saves us. We innocently enough get distracted. Well, innocently enough in the best of conditions, a lack of attentiveness in the best of conditions. Truthfully, more often than not, it is not a forgetfulness that leads us away but instead the drive of the Seven Deadly Sins that lures us farther and farther away from where we began and where we are meant to be. We begin to crave the things of this world, we begin to hunger for the pleasures of this world. We think if I eat enough gluttony, gluttony, if I eat enough, if I eat the right things, if I pursue that road “Oh, it is so delicious”, I learn this week that major food manufacturers, not growers, engineer foods they cease to bake them and grow them, they engineer them for maximum addiction possibility. The perfect combination of sweet and salty. Just so that we will crave it even more and we follow that road. Lust; one that is extremely prevalent in our society. If I sleep with enough people, if I have enough experiences I will be successful in some way, I will have accomplished something for that is lifted up as something to which we should strive. Or maybe it is envy and breed that pull you away. I love my neighbor’s house, they have that extra room and if I just had that space, we wouldn’t argue in the house anymore, there would be room to breathe, we wouldn’t have to clean up all the time, it would be perfect if we only had that extra space because our neighbor has it and I see their life is perfect. We follow the empty promise that if we sell our house and buy one, build one like our neighbors, it then will be just so. But, then we get in that house and we fill that extra room and we look down the road to a new neighbor with a bigger house, with more toys, and more bells and more whistles and the journey begins

again. Maybe it is just filling the house out of greed for more and more and more, if I have the right things, if I buy the right things, if I own enough, I will be enough; and there the sheep go wandering. Interesting thing about that wandering is that it comes from a very real hunger. We sense a hole inside of ourselves and we crave that it be filled. We want that hunger to be safe shaded. We want that thirst to be quenched, we want to feel whole, we want to feel we belong and we follow after the pursuit of something in this world that surely will fill that void; somehow that emptiness will go away if only we have enough. If only and there we go. The sad irony to that journey is that as we are craving for that hole to be filled in our lives, the hole does not become filled but instead it grows. The further we go down that path, the more we realize the thing for which we pursue that that thing is not enough and there must be a new thing, that hole gets bigger for every size until “what happens?” We are nothing, nothing but a bag of bones. Dry, parched, rattling pile of bones. We find ourselves in a distant land, we find ourselves absolutely empty. That is a horrible place to be for as we have craved belonging, we find ourselves utterly alone. As we have craved to fill ourselves filled up, we find ourselves ultimately bearing the sun beating down every bit of strength, every bit of hope, every bit of life that we once experienced is now gone and we are but a pile of bones, drying in the noon day sun wondering how we got so far from where we are meant to be and the sad thing is that our human brothers and sisters who would promise an earthly fix to that hole, when we find ourselves amongst the valley of the dry bones, well they step right over us and wait for the next one. They don’t care that we are dried up. We become useless. All hope is lost. Ezekiel is preaching to the Israelites as they have found themselves in the Babylonian ____ and they are far from home, far from the Temple, far from everything they have ever known and they are craving to belong, they are craving a sense of _____, they want that hole to be filled. Ezekiel sees that and hears the word of God and joins God looking over the valley of the dry bones. A place of despair, a place of emptiness, of hopelessness, of nothingness; almost so void you cannot be depressed anymore because that takes energy and you just don’t have it anymore. There are hundreds of valleys of dry bones in our world today filled with those moments in our lives and the people in our lives who have hungered after something but chosen the wrong thing to try and fill it. I have a friend who is dear in my life and I only run into him every once in a while. He is a Vietnam Vet. When he got home from the war in an effort to escape the nightmares, he became an addict. He thought that that pain could be quenched by first alcohol, then drugs. As he became accustomed to one drug, he moved on to the next. Sadly not an unusual story for our brothers and sisters who were a part of that war. He became so addicted that he actually overdosed and he was pronounced dead and he was taken to the morgue and he remembers quiet distinctly waking up on that table and sucking in that first breathe. Thankfully for me, I have known him after that transformation and never do I see him when he does not give me a huge hug and he has a smile on his face. He learned in that moment that the only thing that could ever fill that hole that could ever touch that hopelessness, that despair, that terror in his life, it’s the love of Gob and he became a minister and a pastor! Ezekiel would say to us today that though we might be in the valley of dry bones, God is there too! In our sequence hymn

for today we sang these words “I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto to me and rest and in your weariness lay down your head upon my breast. I came to Jesus as I was so weary, worn and sad. I found in him a resting place and he has made me glad. I heard the voice of Jesus say “Behold freely give the living water, thirsty ones, stoop down and drink and live”. I came to Jesus and I drank of that life giving stream, my thirst was quenched, my sole revived and now I live in him. I heard the voice of Jesus say “I am this dark world’s light, look unto me, your morn shall rise and all your day be bright. I look to Jesus and I found in him my star, my son, and in that light of life, I walk til pilgrim days are done.” There is no valley deep enough, no place far enough, nowhere so void of hope, there is no moment of udder despair, udder emptiness, there is no time in which you find yourselves nothing but a bag of bones that God cannot reach. We are never, never beyond the power of God’s restore. We are never outside of the reach of Christ’s loving embrace. I hope that as next week we begin our Holy journey from Palm Sunday through the pain of Holy Week into the resurrection morn of Easter, I pray that you will not fear those memories of the times when you too were in the valley of dry bones but instead will hold on to those memories for they are what inform us, what resurrection is really about. Thanks be to God. Amen.

APPENDIX D

The Seven Last Words of Jesus

Today, you will be with me in paradise...

Good Friday 2014

The Rev. Liz Schellingerhoudt

When my daughter was four years old, she attended a preschool. There was some drama in the classroom that was upsetting her, something to do with the other girls, but from what she was telling me, I couldn't quite figure out what was going on. So I scheduled a playdate at our house, a swimming party, for the girls. I took a day off from work, we put out the plastic pool in the backyard and everyone came over after preschool ended.

It was fascinating to watch. At four years old, there was a definite pecking order. One of the girls organized everyone else into a line to get into the pool, and how much she liked or disliked a girl determined the order in which she was allowed to get into the pool. Everyone went along with this girl's directions, and lined up accordingly. My daughter, despite the party being at her house, was the last in line, the last to be "allowed" to go into the pool, and barely allowed at that. I had my answer as to why she was upset.

It's human nature, really, this determination we make about people: who fits, who doesn't fit; how valuable they are to us; if they are the right people to associate with or good enough for us; if they follow the rules of behavior we think matter. It's this tendency of ours to disassociate with people who don't measure up that Jesus challenges in many of his parables. The son who abandons his father and family and spends all of his money, is not turned away or admonished, but lavishly welcomed home. The laborers who are late to arrive in the field are paid the same amount as those who have toiled all day long. The stories smack of unfairness to us, unfairness to the brother and father of the Prodigal Son; unfairness to the laborers who faithfully show up on time and work all day. There are clearly folks in these stories who we wouldn't want to associate with, who should be out, if not for good then at least until they do something to make up for the ways in which they messed up.

There is what Episcopal priest and author Robert Capon calls ethical affluence, which creates a good bit of comfort for those of us who are working hard to do the right thing. It's not that doing the right thing, living a morally or ethically good life is unimportant. It's very important. We are given the example of Jesus's life to emulate and how we live makes a difference in our relationship with God, with each other, and with the rest of the world. The problem is that it doesn't save us. Regardless of how hard we try, we cannot erase or make up for the fact that we are human, and sinful. We will always try either to line up other people or to judge the other people in the line, even if we are last in line. We know how to do it even when we are four years old. There is no such thing as good enough just because of ethical affluence.

Capon, in his book, The Mystery of Christ and Why We Don't Get it, describes how he thinks the gift of salvation through Christ works. He says it's as if everyone is invited to a large party in a stadium. The ticket is free, and comes with all the trimmings for free – hot dogs, candy and even a beer. The only requirement is to walk up to the stadium and get your ticket. It is a party thrown for everyone, not just the ethically affluent.

This notion creates a problem for most of us. It seems unjust. There are people who don't even try. And then there are those who seem downright evil. Do you mean murderers, sex traffickers, those who are notoriously evil, like Hitler? Yes, Capon says, and he draws on the letter to the Ephesians and other scripture to make his claim. If there is a hell, Capon says, it is hell perhaps because Jesus is relentlessly knocking on the door and the only way to get the noise to stop is to accept a ticket to the party.

It is a challenging idea. It challenges everything that we have in place that makes this world and our lives functional. We have set up transactions of value, and these transactions make life livable and without them we would fall into chaos. For example, you have to pass a test to acquire a driver's license, to practice law or medicine, to become a priest. Evaluation matters to us, and makes our world work.

“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” With these last words of Jesus, though, I think we have to sit with the challenge that evaluation does not apply to the afterlife.

As Jesus hung on the cross, he was mocked by the leaders and the soldiers. Two criminals, one to his left and one to his right, hung with him. One of the criminals joins in with the crowds, deriding Jesus and taunting him. ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ The taunt echoes the taunt of Satan in the desert. Even at this hour, this first criminal is playing to the crowds, joining in the mockery of Jesus.

But the second criminal cries out against the first criminal, admitting that their guilt justifies their condemnation to hang on the cross. He also proclaims Jesus' innocence. Then he says, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Remember me. Hold me in your heart and mind, and don't let me get lost. Remember me.

Jesus replies, ‘I assure you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ This may be one of the most encouraging and challenging verses in all of Scripture. Jesus promises that the criminal will be with him in paradise. The text of Luke gives us no reason to believe this man had been a follower of Jesus, or even a believer in him in any way that we would recognize. He may have felt remorse for whatever he did – and we have no indication what that might have been – but he did not even repent aloud. Yet he recognized something in Jesus, and asked not to be forgotten by him. Somehow he trusted that Jesus could make a difference to him even after death.

This criminal does not have any of the indicators which let us believe he is one of those who are “in.” He was not a follower of Jesus, surely didn’t hold onto the right theology, admitted that whatever he did deserved crucifixion, yet somehow decided that Jesus was trustworthy. It is good news for us, for those of us who want to live rightly, who care about understanding God, who care about the questions and the answers. We should live our lives each day as disciples of Jesus. But we don’t have to worry about getting it right all the time. It is not what saves us. And that is very good news. Our relationship with Jesus comes down to simple trust. “Jesus, remember me,” we cry. And Jesus, embodying the mercy of God, responds with, “I assure you, you will be with me in paradise.” We are welcome there not because we are right about anything, but because God is merciful.

The good news is very good news. The challenge, however, is that we do not get to choose who is there with us, and the ethically affluent may be outnumbered.

I love to see who walks into church on Sunday mornings. Our doors to Peachtree are wide open, and we have our share of strangers walking in. They often aren’t here for church, and could care less about worship, our theology, our programs, and the many ways we live out our faith. They need money for food or shelter, drugs or alcohol, and they need it immediately. They may need a host of medications to help with mental illness or physical ailments. They may have had very bad luck, or they may have brought their woes upon themselves. They often have no family or other support systems, sometimes that’s just the way it is and sometimes they have worn out the people who have tried to love them. They are a gift to us. I witness over and over again your compassionate response to their presence, and they allow us to practice seeing the other as a member of the kingdom of God, for no other reason than God says so.

The criminal who asked to be remembered did not need to ask. We are in God’s memory, never to be lost. But we’re not alone. There is no one created who is lost to God’s memory. Jesus’s response to the criminal is the response to all. And we need to be prepared for that. We will not be alone, but surrounded by the largest crowd of people we can imagine, and particularly by those we can’t imagine. The more practice we have now, seeing another person as beloved and remembered by God, the more likely we are to enjoy the party. Next time you meet someone who seems unworthy of God’s love, or someone you simply don’t like, practice saying to them “we will be together in paradise.”

Amen.

APPENDIX E

Text of sermon preached by The Rev. Dick Game
Year A, Proper 9
St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, Dunwoody, GA

Hear the word of God to all who truly turn to him:

 Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden,
 and I will refresh you.

Does this sound familiar to anyone here?

For the liturgical nerds among us,

 these are the opening line of what are called
 the comfortable words from our rite 1 Eucharist.

They come right after the confession and absolution,
 just before the peace,

 These words are intended to reinforce
 that God truly loves us
 redeems us

 and forgives us.

Let's see if I remember the other comfortable words.

 I heard them for the first 18 years of my life in the church,
 before we had our present prayerbook.

Who said Episcopalian's don't memorize scripture.

 Those comfortable

 words in the prayer book

 open with that familiar verse from Matthew 11

 we heard this morning, in the King's English, of course

 "Come unto me all ye that travail

 and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

It is an invitation to a heavenly hammock,

 where we can rest safe and secure,

 knowing that we are cradled

 like an infant in God's own love.

Oh to be refreshed.

 Let's sit with that for just a moment.

 You do know that Jesus wants you to be refreshed, right,
 with energy and joy and boldness.

If you take nothing else away from my words today

 I want you to hold fast to this,

 that Jesus wants you to be refreshed.

There is always more with Jesus, am I right?
Are we ready for it this morning?
These comfortable words from Matthew
are coupled with an invitation.

Jesus says,
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Yes, be refreshed.
But yes, come and learn from me.
Be my disciple.
Take my yoke which is easy,
my burden which is light.

Really?
Since we have been following along in Matthew these past weeks,
We know that this discipleship business
seems anything but light and easy.
Two weeks ago Matthew warned of persecution.

That Jesus had not come to bring peace to the earth;
but a sword.
Setting a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one's foes will be members of one's own household."

That sounds anything but easy to me.

And what is a yoke anyway?
An easy yoke
—that seems like something you might
order on an eggs benedict
at J. Christopher's.

Aren't those two yokes spelled differently?

Well, at least know that much.

But I dare say we know more about egg yolks than ox yokes.

Most of us have never worked the land.

In the past 100 years,
Mechanized agriculture
with combines and disc plows
have displaced
the brace of oxen dragging the bull tongue plow.

Some of you have seen an ox yoke though, right?

My grandparents had one at their cabin in western north Carolina. It was
handmade by Tommy Barnes,
a subsistence farmer who lived in Buckcreek
outside of Franklin.

I think he used pine for the stock, because it was less likely than poplar
to split

and the hoops for the ox necks were bent hickory.
And there was a big wrought iron ring bolted to the middle of it
For the reins.

Tommy Barnes actually became famous in the 1970's,
He was featured in one of the Foxfire books—volume 2.
Foxfire was a series of books published
out of the rabun gap nacoochee school
—a journalism project designed to record for posterity
how Appalachian handicrafts were made
before those skills died out with the craftsman

Demand for Tommy's ox yokes skyrocketed in those years.

Many wanted to take home a piece
of genuine Appalachian handicraft.

Now I could be wrong here,
But my recollection is that Tommy
Must have made a smaller, decorative version for sale,
about 3 feet across as opposed to 4 or 5,
suitable for hanging above a fireplace mantle
or to wire up
and convert into a rustic chandelier.

My grandparents had one of these smaller ones.

I do not remember exactly how they displayed
their Barnes original decorative ox yoke,
but the image lodged in my child's mind is of it being
upside down---hoopside up.

I knew that the contraption was called an ox yoke.

They said as much

But I never got the connection

between what I remember as a diminutive decoration

and how a working version
might actually operate in the field
linking two huge animals.

You could maybe yoke up my lab, hunker,
and Bismark, my grandparent's shepherd,
But the hoops on this mantelpiece decoration
Were too small for ox heads.
This yoke would have been of

no use to a farmer.
For, you see, to be of any practical use,
the yoke must fit.

In our gospel this morning,
The NRSV has Jesus say that his yoke is “easy”
And that is an unfortunate translation of the Greek
An alternative and I believe more useful rendering
Is that the yoke Jesus describes is well-suited
like clothing.
While the work may be hard,
The burden is light
Because the yoke fits.

The yoke fit my friend Fr. Mike Tanner.
Not everyone has the passion, stamina and energy
to minister day in and day out
among the poor and mentally challenged.
But from the moment he stepped foot on the campus
at Holy Comforter 10 years ago,
Mike was captivated.
He knew that he had found his priestly vocation.
And here is the interesting thing.
Mike and I both arrived at Holy Comforter on the very same day, as a
discernment class.
And yet, I did not feel that same strong calling.
That was Mike’s call.
For that yoke fit him like a glove.

So let me get a little personal here.
Some of you may remember that my first cure
was at Trinity Church in Columbus, Georgia.
While I was starting a new career as a priest
Anne was midstream in hers in Atlanta.
Meanwhile, the girls were settled in their schools
in a school district we were pleased with.
The idea of uprooting for a two year position
Was unsettling to us,
and yet I felt so very called to that parish.
So after much family prayer,
and at first saying no, then praying again,
we finally did what we said we would never do.
We said yes both to Trinity and yes to our life
in Atlanta.

We maintained two households,
and everyone commuted
the four hour roundtrip
for what turned out to be three—not two years.

The girls rarely missed Sundays
and often came down midweek.

Meanwhile, I booked it back to Atlanta
every Thursday night
and at other times for
softball games, piano recitals
and other events.

I think we put a combined 70,000 miles on our cars those years.
And looking back, I am not exactly sure how we did it.
It seems insane now.

Except for this truth:
that was Jesus' yoke for us,
and it fit us at that time
and for that time.

Let me tell you, we are so thankful to be here at St. Patrick's
and off the road.

Yet we still drive by Trinity Church
every time we head to the beach on the panhandle
In fact, we went by Trinity
just yesterday afternoon.
And we remain amazingly grateful
for our time and memories there.

For the yoke fit us.

I wonder how much of our weariness
comes from laboring in yokes that do not fit.

Or maybe in putting our shoulder to yokes of our own choosing
struggling hard by ourselves, alone
without the companionship of Jesus
working with us in tandem
in balance with us,
shoulders into the yoke together.

Such hard work.

Take a moment now, if you would,
and imagine Jesus loving you as deeply
as you have ever been loved,
calling you to come to him

with those comfortable words
you who are weary
and carrying heavy burdens.

Will you allow Jesus to refresh you?

And now, as we celebrate our nation's independence this weekend
I wonder if we might this morning
declare our dependence again
on the one who is humble and gentle.

That we might listen again for Jesus' invitation
to nuzzle up with him,
side by side,
in that yoke that fits us perfectly.
Treading side by side
With the one whose service
is perfect freedom,

Where we find rest for our souls.

APPENDIX F

Text of sermon preached by The Rev. Sharon Hiers
Year A, Lent 5
St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Atlanta, GA

You know that look? The one that just says everything? You and someone you are close to, someone you know intimately well for whatever reason, you are at an event. Say a dinner party, or an evening out with friends - some new, some old. You are getting to know folks, and having small talk and then someone you don't know really well says something shocking to you - something you didn't expect, or an opinion you don't agree with, or maybe just something uniformed. You find your person in the room, you lock eyes, and with one simple raised eyebrow between you, they know exactly what you are thinking.

No words necessary. It could be hours later...you are finally alone, riding home in the car and still you don't need all those words. The conversation is one only you two can follow, and if someone were in the back seat they would be completely lost:

“Can you believe...?”

I know! And did you see his face when...?

Michael had to be so embarrassed...?

She probably had no idea about...?

I know, I know...you are right...?

I sure wouldn't want to be there when...?

Oof, no kidding...!

Hey you want to grab...?

Ice cream? I thought you'd never ask...

This is sort of what it feels like is happening with Jesus and the disciples in today's gospel reading, and we are the ones listening uniformed, like something is missing. See, in the omitted verses we don't get from Matthew today, the text tells us Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. Without parables he didn't tell them anything - but he looks at his disciples, and with a raised eyebrow, they seem to know exactly what is not being said. And then, Jesus goes into the house...with only his disciples, and they have one of those conversations:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure someone hid in a field and buys the field and is joyful...

Yeah - not really sure that's the best way but...

Okay, so the kingdom of heaven is like a guy who sells everything to buy a really great pearl....

Did you hear how his wife responded??

The kingdom of heaven is like a fisherman who threw back the ones that weren't any good, but put the rest in baskets...

And they look at him and say, oh yeah right. Got it.

Hey, want to get some...?

Ice cream? I thought you'd never ask...

I feel like I'm in the back seat, and want to raise my hand and say - Pardon me...um, what?!? But I think there is something deeper going on here. While Jesus maybe trying to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like, I think they are learning a whole lot more about it from what he is not saying than what he is. Matthew wants his hearers to get the meaning of these parables, but maybe Jesus taught them to us to ponder, to consider. Not to explain away - which is so tempting as a preacher. But to take them...not just as isolated stories, but in the context of the whole of Jesus' life, and teaching, and ministry, and death, and resurrection.

And if I'm being honest, here is where I find myself pushing back on the concept of those red letter bibles...the ones that isolate what the writers consider were verbatim words of Jesus...instead of stopping to consider the whole story of who Jesus is, whether he blatantly said who he was or not. And you and I both know Jesus was NOT one to say exactly who he was...Remember how the gospel of John starts: In the beginning was the WORD. Not the words....not Jesus' words, but THE WORD...Jesus himself. God incarnate.

Now, more than at any time in history, we are inundated with words. We can't get away from them. There's something talking to us or at us almost every second. When we watch TV, there's the talking on the main program, and often there's another story scrolling across the bottom of the screen. And then depending on the late breaking news we have to know right this very second, the screen may even be split to include that too. Our brains have learned to adapt to two, or three, or more conversations at once. We're talking to someone in the room with us while reading an article on our smartphone or computer or while we have another conversation via text and tweeting about it, or

updating a Facebook status. We can read the paper or a magazine while listening to NPR on the radio. Words are coming at us from all different directions, and we are taking them all in.

Friends, I'm not convinced we need them all.

My mother called me recently in a panic. She was driving to see a friend who had just lost her husband in a tragic car accident. She had turned around twice already, not sure she could do it - not sure she could walk into the weight of the situation and terrified because she didn't have any idea what she was going to say. She called me convinced that I had the words. She called me because surely her priest daughter had been told by exactly what to say in this situation. I remember after her nervous rambling the silence between us...I remember hearing her anxiety and having no idea what to say to her. I remember finally asking her...“Mom...think about when you have had loss...think about when your mother died...tell me something someone said?” There was more silence...and then she softly said “I can't...but I remember who was there...I remember who showed up.”

Sometimes when words fail us, it can be our greatest gift. Words are our comfort, our companions. We rely on them because they're always there for us. Except when they aren't. Except for those times when there just aren't any words to be said. When we sit at the bedside of a loved one, knowing that their healing will look like a departure rather than a cure, and we just don't know what to say. When we face a friend who has just experienced unbearable grief or loss. And we want to say something. But what? When we've been so deeply wounded, or have wounded someone else, to such an extent that 'I'm sorry' isn't anywhere near adequate. We're so accustomed to quick responses – immediate and easy answers to complicated questions ... saying anything to avoid saying nothing. We're accustomed to a steady supply of white noise -- so much so that we're really quite uncomfortable with silence, with the absence of words.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. I have come to believe St. Paul. It is a lesson I have to learn over and over but it is true. It is in sacred silence where the Holy Spirit finally gets a word in edgewise. It's in that rare and precious silence where things are spoken which surpass words in any language. It's in that holy space of quiet where hearts communicate at a level deeper than anything we can say or write or even think. But we have to remember to show up, to be present to what might be, even when we don't have any words to say. And we have to remember to show up - not just to others, but to the presence of God in our lives. And we have to trust that the Holy Spirit is present in that sacred silence.

When we recall the stories of Jesus, when we think about who he was and what he did, most of us - without a bible in hand - can't tell others the words he used. And honestly, remember the gospel stories weren't written for decades after Jesus lived, died, rose and ascended, so exact words are suspect anyway. But we do know where he showed up...we

know where he stood and listened to the question: What do you want me to do for you? We know that he went to the tomb of a friend and comforted those sisters with his holy tears. We know that he went away in silence to pray. We know that he walked the way of the cross, and with barely more than a look in his eye comforted his mother as he died. And we know, when we have no words, Jesus comes to us still, Jesus shows up and is present with us. And if we are quiet, if we sit in that silence and listen, while we may not hear God, maybe just maybe we can feel God near us.

Because the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

APPENDIX G

The Rev. Keith Oglesby

Sermon, Proper 14, Year A August 10, 2014

I imagine most of us have seen—and heard—what I heard and saw the other day. I was in my car in a turning lane when the arrow for turning left turned green. I was about two cars from the front car in line. The driver of that car must have been distracted and did not respond to the green arrow. About three seconds after the light turned green it started—someone behind me started honking their horn. Not a gentle “tap, tap” but one long, loud blast, followed by two more. I think it startled the whole city block, but whether from passive aggressive stubbornness or continued inattention, the driver at the front of the line did not move right away. Eventually the car did move and we all made it through the light, including the person I assumed was the “honker.”

You see, I could figure out who it was based on what they did next. They raced by me at high speed and when I looked over, I saw a person in an obviously agitated state. He flew up the left hand lane and when he reached the car with the slow-reacting driver, he hesitated, honked, and made a universal gesture communicating his feelings. Then he sped up and drove on. Now in an ideal world, I would have found this driver a few miles later, pulled over by the police. But at least this day, it did not happen. I never saw the honker again. Thankfully he did not have a “Honk if you love Jesus” bumper sticker on the back of his car.

But what this driver did give that day is an example-- on a simple and silly scale-- of a big problem in our world. The problem is control. I believe that many of the problems I have—and I imagine many of us have—are related to issues of control. Who is in charge, who should be in charge, and who is fighting to be in charge in life? Also, how do we react when it becomes clear that we are not in control of the important issues of our life?

From its earliest days, the church has addressed the issue of control in our primal creeds and confessions. Paul alluded to probably the earliest Christian confession in today’s epistle when he wrote: “Jesus is Lord.” The church has stated that to be a Christian, it is about more than a set of ideological beliefs; it is about relationships. The primary relationship for us as Christians is with Jesus; and the tenor of that relationship is that we rely on Jesus as our Lord to direct and empower us to live a life that is whole and holy.

The belief that “Jesus is Lord” is critical. Because the opposite belief—that I am in control and need to do whatever it takes to get what I want in life—is antithetical to Christian discipleship. And to be honest, that effort to be in control is stressful and eventually debilitating as a way to live. Let me give you a few examples.

A day in and day out area where control becomes an issue is in large organizations. I can speak to that based on twenty-four years working for Fortune 500 companies and now seven years working within The Episcopal Church. Outside of the U.S. government, you don't get much bigger and controlling than big corporations or the church. The stress that often comes from being part of a large organization is what to do when we don't agree with what the larger entity has decided. How do we respond to that?

I can tell you from my corporate life that there are some typical behaviors. One option is to go up the chain of command with my concerns. Occasionally that might result in a tweak, especially if the decision was made just one level above me. But if the decision was made at headquarters that feedback process is unlikely to make a difference in the decisions that have been made.

So what would often happen next is a combination of things. First, I would get together with like-minded employees, usually people at the same grade level as me and "discuss" the decision over a beverage. Depending on what the beverage was (coffee or beer), we would tend to open up more and more about how bad the decision was and how we would all suffer from it. Next I would try to implement the decision, sometimes grudgingly; sometimes with a smile and the best spin I could muster. Sometimes the decision ended up being a good one; and sometimes not.

Now regardless of how it turned out and how I reacted in my professional role, I can tell you that over time, that issue of control can begin to wear on folks. Our common reactions remind me of the cartoon I saw posted in many different offices over the years. It stated— "Stress is that confusion you have when your mind overrides your body's desire to (yell at) someone who desperately deserves it" (I cleaned that up some). If we go through life with that type of stress over issues beyond our control, we become unhappy people.

Issues of control are not limited to working in large organizations or waiting for someone ahead of us in line to see the light and turn left. Some issues of control have to do with critical relationships, like our spouse, our children, or our parents. These relationships are so important to us and our happiness and identity as human beings. We want to be happy and we want the people we love to be happy. Because of that, we bring expectations to our relationships, and because they are so important, some of us work hard to get the outcomes we desire for the people we love.

A relatively safe example is what goes on between teenagers and their parents. As a dad, I wanted my teen children to be happy, safe, successful—all those criteria that most of us share. I was not one of those parents that said what success needed to be—I would have been as happy whether one was an athlete or an artist or whatever. But our children had their challenges as they moved through the teen years and I had challenges in how best to respond to them and manage my expectations for them. Because no matter what my good

intentions were, it was very easy to cross the line between helping and trying to control the people closest to me that I cared about so much.

I want to keep our kids' stories private, so let me give you an example from another family that none of you know. Our son grew up with a boy his age that was very talented musically. He played viola and could even compose music at a young age. His dad was a pilot and a graduate from the Air Force Academy where he played football. Understandably, the dad wanted his son to play football, too. And the son was actually pretty good at it. But he loved music. You can probably write the rest of the story—there was tension between them that continued and got worse as the boy became a young man. By trying to control someone else, even with what the dad saw as good intentions, it ended up putting a long term strain on a very important relationship.

Issues about control pop up in all different areas of life and too often we “honk our horns,” so to speak, instead of remembering the core belief of our faith—“Jesus is Lord” (not me). Some areas are heart-breaking and the people involved are stuck in something beyond corporate politics or even parenting. Just think of dealing with serious illnesses, struggles with addiction, or even natural disasters. We can be devastated because we want stability and a healthy sense of control in life. Yet even then, our confession of faith—Jesus is Lord—still shows us the way to endure.

Because even in a crisis, even when we want something healthy and good for others, it is important to learn and remember that we are not in control, we are not absolute arbiters of outcomes. What we cannot control, clearly, are other people and circumstances. Struggling with that lack of control is where our stress comes from in life. But that hard reality does not mean we are helpless. With God's help, we can control how we respond to other people and difficult circumstances.

So for example, if we love someone who is making decisions with which we disagree, our first response can be to pause and pray for them and commend them and their life to God. When we talk with them, we can take a deep breath and listen before we talk. And when our buttons get pushed, like only a loved one can do, we can try to disconnect the wiring to our typical responses of anger or frustration or fear; and make space instead for God's Spirit to guide us. Now don't get me wrong—this is hard to do—but when I take the time to practice being in control of my response instead of trying to control someone else's behavior, I find I am able to cope better and maintain a healthier relationship with the person I love, regardless of what happens.

Now all this advice is helpful, but it is incomplete. We are inadequate to face these issues of control based on our own will power and moral virtue. We may feel overwhelmed by our circumstances. That is when our faith is so critical. When we are not strong enough, when the circumstances of our lives are just too much, we can turn to Jesus to help us when we feel out of control and scared or angry or uncertain. Because of our confession that “Jesus is Lord,” we have access to the example of his life and the examples of holy

men and women who follow him, too. And we have access to his grace that can give us a different type of power when we struggle with control about other people and situations.

The type of power that Jesus provides gives us peace. It enables us to pray and have the inner strength to commend the people we love and the circumstances we worry about to God's tender care. That type of power enables us to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. And Jesus' power gives us humility so that we focus on what we can control with God's help; versus what is beyond our control. When we have that type of power in our lives, then we can let go of our need to control what we really can't control anyway. Getting that clear—trusting that Jesus is Lord, not me-- is the key to our salvation and a life filled with grace.

Amen.

APPENDIX H

Getting the group together:

1. Identify four to five priests in the diocese, with some geographical connection that have been ordained between 5-10 years.
2. Email them with your idea of starting a peer mentor group to explore and develop preaching skills together.
3. There are a few criteria that need to be considered:
 - a. One must be willing to commit to attend the first six sessions to start
 - b. Identify the location and time that each group will meet
 - c. Each member must be willing to present a sermon that has been either audio or visually recorded and shared with the group prior to one of the session
 - d. One must be open to feedback, and willing to explore other styles and forms of preaching
4. The format of each gathering will be:
 - half of each session will be critiquing a sermon, giving feedback, and learning how to give feedback
 - and half will be a lectionary study on an upcoming text we will be preaching on.
5. Conclude the email asking the recipient to consider your invitation and pray about it. Ask to know their initial thoughts, and if this is something they may be interested in. If so, wonderful. If not, that is good and faithful, and you can ask someone else.

For whatever reason, and God's good grace, I did not have to ask many priests to consider this. There were only two individuals that could not make it work, but both expressed a deep desire to be involved in such a group in the future.

The First Meeting:

We gathered on a Friday morning from 9:00 - 11:30am. Regular meetings after would be two hours, but for the first meeting, I asked for an extra half hour for some discussion, introduction, hopes and expectations. We also began with Morning Prayer together. This set our tone and called us back to the one who calls us always.

Prior to the meeting, we had listened to the sermon of one member and began our discussion with it. The following questions were directed to the preacher:

- How did the sermon feel to preach?
- How did it feel to listen to it?
- Anything you would have done any differently?

Other questions were directed to the group:

- What was the focus of the sentence? What were you called to do or feel or remember?
- What image did you walk away with? What does this image do for you in your call as a Christian?
- Was there anything that didn't work? Was distracting? Left you unsettled in a way that wasn't mean to be unsettling?

There have been two meetings since the initial one and I have been delighted to discover not only do we have a connection around the preaching aspect of our time together, but around our pastoral responses and spiritual depths in our preaching, as well. We talk about what the parish needs from us, what the text calls us to, and if they compliment or contrast and what we do when that happens.

The depth of conversation is strong. We check in with each gathering to see what we have learned or gleaned from our time together. And we pray.

The Rev. Sharon Hiers

June 2014

APPENDIX I

Why Do You Preach Like That?

1. How long have you been preaching?
 - 1-5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 10-15 years
 - 15+ years

2. How many formal preaching/homiletics classes have you taken, including seminary?
 - 1-2
 - 3-4
 - 5+

3. Mark any methods you routinely use to improve your preaching:
 - Listening to sermons by others
 - Reading books on preaching or sermons
 - Seeking written feedback from parishioners
 - Meeting regularly with a group of parishioners to discuss your preaching
 - Clergy peer group or mentor group specifically around preaching/sermons
 - Formal classroom instruction
 - Other (please specify)

4. Please describe any formal or organized feedback you have received on your preaching, ie peer groups, parishioner groups, feedback forms.

5. Evaluate the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with my preaching abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would benefit from more feedback on my preaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would be willing to be a part of a clergy group on preaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with the amount of continuing education on preaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Please share three resources you regularly use in sermon preparation.

7. Name one thing you believe would help you preach more effectively.

APPENDIX J

Why Do You Preach Like That? RESULTS

1. How long have you been preaching?

- 1-5 years 7 (12%)
- 5-10 years 24 (42%)
- 10-15 years 14 (25%)
- 15+ years 12 (21%)

2. How many formal preaching/homiletics classes have you taken, including seminary?

- 1-2 24 (42%)
- 3-4 17 (30%)
- 5+ 16 (28%)

3. Mark any methods you routinely use to improve your preaching:

- Listening to sermons by others 42 (81%)
- Reading books on preaching or sermons 34 (65%)
- Seeking written feedback from parishioners 12 (23%)
- Meeting regularly with a group of parishioners to discuss your preaching 5 (10%)
- Clergy peer group or mentor group specifically on preaching/sermons 16 (31%)
- Formal classroom instruction 9 (17%)
- Other (please specify) 13 (see below)

- Attending the Festival of Homiletics
- Podcasts, specifically the one on workingpreacher.com
- All of the above but earlier in my preaching life
- Text this Week (online resource)
- Listening to my own sermons. Listening to "Writers Almanac"
- I listen.
- Homiletical conferences every 2-3 years; discuss sermon outcomes with preacher husband
- I have a handful of colleagues with whom I bounce around ideas and share sermons, usually via text or email.
- Interdenominational clergy text study was a regular part of my preaching life in my last diocese. We met weekly for an hour and a half to study the text and explore preaching themes.
- Reading poetry -- it allows for consideration of cadence, economy of language, and word choice.
- Ongoing coursework (1 class a year right now); informal feedback, reading other sermons more than listening to others

- I also explore poetry and some visualization techniques. Also, how contemplative practices can help nurture an experience within larger groups...e.g. guided meditation.
- Preaching conferences

4. Please describe any formal or organized feedback you have received on your preaching, ie peer groups, parishioner groups, feedback forms. 34 responses

- only in classroom settings.
- The pretty birds much have served as reminders of areas that I need to be careful about
- I don't really have any formal methodology, but when someone tells me something they heard or thought from my sermon that I didn't think was there, I look for a way to have a conversation about that and learn more about how they heard what I thought I said. Sometimes what I think I'm saying and what people are saying are not always the same thing. :)
- Best was through a process by the old College of Preachers. Glad to share. Very simple process. I also often follow up "I loved your sermon" with "would you share what particularly went into that?" and remind people that specific praise, not general praise, is the one that has value.
- Feedback from rector and vestry members.
- Share sermons with people sometimes before sometimes after preaching
- Weekly feedback in clergy meetings.
- My first 2 years of ministry I had a lay sermon feedback committee.
- Round table discussions after Wed night pot lucks
- Parishioner groups who for a period met with me once a month regarding a particular sermon.
- Most feedback is informal.
- Peer group led by this really sharp D. Min. student.
- None. One of my professors said we need to look out from the pulpit and see who is not there. Where are they? Why is our preaching not reaching them? Make changes from that position. Thus, I listen to sermons from mega churches in the neighborhood, where many of our parishioners attend.
- No formal - lots of informal.
- Peer groups in both M.Div and D.Min in Preaching degree Preaching group in my congregation made up of 7-8 folks
- Designed a survey for parishioners to fill out when a seminarian in a parish. Little response.
- n/a
- Used a survey during summer of 2013. Some of it helpful/useful. Feedback form remains available on website for feedback any time.

- I use the form one of my preaching professors in seminary created and once every few months give it to a few parishioners as well as our seminary students to provide feedback on my sermons. I meet with them, if they have time, either right after the service or the following Wednesday to hear their feedback. I am also part of a clergy group and we provide feedback on one another's sermons once a month online.
- Recently, I got feedback as part of my CREDO profile.
- Only peer group and mentorship in seminary
- Really none that is "formal" or "organized" since seminary
- I help explain complicated things in an understandable way. People "want to be told what to do," so sometimes my sermons "don't go far enough." Most feedback is not detailed.
- No formal feedback process has been established
- I have participated in a group reflection process that was very helpful. We discussed the structure and "style" of sermons, looking at how we structured them, both logistically, one might say, and theologically.
- Peer group. Viewing/Listening to sermon then commenting
- Early in group process--haven't shared a sermon, yet.
- Good story teller
- Peer group!
- Sadly, I don't have much to contribute here!
- Majority of feedback is focused on delivery method, prefer method of preaching perceived as extemporaneous as opposed to reading from manuscript
- Weekly colleague sermon review. Also, DMin.
- Credo a questions & CREDO questions
- Clergy mentor group

5. Evaluate the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with my preaching abilities	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 8 (14%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 45 (78%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 (9%)
I would benefit from more feedback on my preaching.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 (2%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 (5%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 39 (67%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 15 (26%)
I would be willing to be a part of a clergy group on preaching.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 8 (14%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 30 (52%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 20 (35%)
I am satisfied with the amount of continuing education on preaching.	<input type="checkbox"/> 9 (16%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 30 (54%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 16 (29%)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 (2%)

6. Please share three resources you regularly use in sermon preparation.

56 responses

- Allen Verhey, Walter Brueggemann, The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible
- Working Preacher, Text Week, Podcasts from Duke Chapel
- Commentaries stories collected over the years, and in the past, Homiletics magazine
- Workingpreacher.com, Synthesis, Tuesday Morning
- Commentaries, newspapers, daily life.
- Feasting on the Word, Multiple Study Bibles (Jewish Annotated NT, Common English Bible, NOAB), Pop Culture
- The Text This Week, my life (including my unconscious and imagination and courage) Sometimes current events/popular culture, etc.
- Greek, Hebrew and Girardian Reflections on the Lectionary
- * Feasting on the Word * Gutierrez's commentary from a liberation theology perspective * Text this Week online
- Frank A. Thomas - They Like to Never Quit Praisin God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching Thomas Long - The Witness of Preaching Marvin McMickle - Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope
- Text week, Frederick Beuchner, sermons of others
- Blueletterbible.org Text week
- NT gateway The Text This Week
- Lectionary homiletics, atla database through candler, feasting on the word
- Feasting on the Word Synthesis New York Times
- Above all, paying attention to conversations, media, my own prayer life --Synthesis -- Reading others' sermons on same readings
- Books by persons I consider good preachers, Feasting on the Word, Working Reacher.org
- Preaching the Word Textweek.com Informal discussion with other clergy
- workingpreacher.org, center for excellence in preaching, davidlose.net
- Prayer, Bible, journaled reflection; various commentaries (Anchor Bible, Sacra Pagina, NIB); studying my context pastorally and in the wider community.
- Bible study, news, feasting on the word
- Greek Text, New Interpreters Bible, Fred Buechner
- Exegesis, newspaper, people
- i read about writing - eudora welty being a big source. I read poetry, some things over and over again. I read chunks of teh bible in KJV or the Messenger to try to hear it differently. I read the newspaper, Richard Rohr, Writer's Almanac daily.
- Synthesis New Interpreters Bible Commentary N.T. Wrights "Everyone" Bible series Weekly Bible Study Group on upcoming gospel text
- Feasting on the Word The New Interpreter's Bible Book of Common Prayer
- Feasting on the Word Commentary NIBC Working Preacher web site
- Bible, various commentaries (especially Sacra Pagina), news media

- Anything written by Frederick Buechner That Feasting on the Word set of books. Uber helpful.
- The New Interpreter's Bible (the 1951 Edition which I greatly prefer to the more recent edition); www.sacredspace.ie; and I read sermons at SermonCentral.Com and other such sites
- Feasting on the Word. Feasting on the Gospel. Good preacher.
- Workingpreacher.com, The New Interpreter's Bible, Feasting on the Word
- Workingpreacher.org Textweek.com New Proclamation
- Working preacher, feasting on the word, my poetry collection
- 1. Anything from David Lose at working preacher! Love him. 2. prayer (I don't mean this lightly) 3. blueletterbible.org (particularly the concordances there)
- www.textweek.com hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.org <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/lectionaryindex.html>
- synthesis, feasting on the work, augsburg commentary
- Feasting on the Word, textweek.org, poetry/the Hymnal 1982
- Bible, textweek, Chris Bryan's class notes, prayer, Martin Smith's "give them an experience of God" techniques; the question: what does the Holy Spirit want the people of God to know in this place on this occasion?, commentaries, mostly accessed online
- Scripture, critical commentaries, media(NYT,WSJ;political magazines)
- Textweek, Working Preacher, commentaries
- Bible, scholarly articles from ATLA Databse
- Poetry.... Blue Letter Bible.... Old Hebrew and New Testament notes from school... Language translation resources
- Commentaries Text this Week Feedback from spouse
- Working Preacher, N.T. Wright's commentary on the lectionary, conversation with other preachers.
- Anchor bible Dictionary Kittle's abridged TextWeek
- Textweek.com, commentaries, other sermons online
- Textweek, working preacher,
- Feasting on the Word; Working Preacher; texts by Barbara Brown Taylor, Frederick Buechner, and/or musicians/singers I listen to.
- Commentaries, greek for NT and Gospel, sermon websites
- Feasting in the Word NIB Workingpreacher.com
- Synthesis Living the Word Homiletic (on line)
- NKJV, Orthodox study Bible, RSV/Greek interlinear new testament; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary.
- Greek NT, Hebrew OT w/ BDB, Girardian Reflections on the Lectionary(website)
- Girardian Reflections on the Lectionary Text This Week
- The Bible, Feasting on the Word, Textweek.com

7. Name one thing you believe would help you preach more effectively. 55 responses

- a course at ITC
- More time to prepare every week
- Time
- i think having some feedback would be wonderful. I'm fairly isolated in my preaching, doing all the preparation on my own, then preaching, then, except for the occasional "good sermon," that's the end of it.
- The ability to preach more consistently. I am on a multi-clergy staff, so if I could preach more than once a month, I think I'd have a better rhythm.
- Feedback that is structured
- Continuing education, such as a preaching workshop.
- Working with a "successful" preacher in helping me to structure my sermon and finding appropriate resources for illustrations.
- Hearing others more frequently: having an associate priest
- More time for prep
- more time to study and read, not just sermon prep but in general and more conversations about the texts
- Better writing process- better attention to theology and structure .
- start work earlier in week to allow more practice and editing
- Year round peer feedback
- more time to reflect on where my life intersects with gospel proclamation
- More structured study/preparation time
- time - both in a week and week upon week, when I take the time to do good study, I preach a better sermon and the more years I have under my belt, the deeper I grow as a preacher.
- Listening.
- A more formal group in the parish trained both to listen and offer helpful feedback
- Leaving sermon text. It works.
- As a recently retired parish priest with many years of feedback that i am an effective preacher- I confess i have an agenda - to chip away at the idea that a sermon is the preacher's game to win or lose. To borrow analogies from farmers, a sermon is as much about the soil as the farmer. I think we need to be pushing back against the critique/ audience model of congregational listening. A sermon is a local and organic and paradoxically sustainable moment in time and place where people are telling/hearing the stories and the practices and the failures and the gifts of their unique life in God together.
- Receiving some direction of usage of gestures to enhance my preaching without appearing dramatic.
- More time to prepare!
- Feedback
- A better understanding of Hebrew and Greek

- Since I primarily preach to middle schoolers, it would be helpful if I had some way of getting feedback from them. But, well, I reckon I'm the only one who can make that happen. I'll get on it. (Ps. Hi!)
- A dedicated study and writing time in my calendar. I wanted to achieve that goal this year, but it didn't happen. Maybe in 2015!
- More advance reading and preparation.
- A local clergy feedback group.
- Listening to better preachers.
- since moving to Atlanta I have felt a huge void of collaboration. I miss voices in freely discussing texts with peers (mostly non-episcopalian pastors). Those discussions started my thinking and imagining and I miss it and feel the lack in my current sermons. Finding a safe place to explore and play with the text is something I really need and miss.
- I am intrigued by the idea of a peer group! And written, intentional feedback from parishioners. I didn't even imagine that could be a "thing." :)
- more time to devote to preparation
- express more of my personal faith/struggles in my sermons. This always produces more response from parishioners. I always preach without notes. awesome
- More uninterrupted time for sermon meditation/preparation.
- Hearing other preachers on a regular, somewhat frequent basis.
- peer feedback
- More time
- What does "more effectively" mean in this context ? Who decides?
- I would like a group where I could imagine a new risk-taking sermon approach....and then try it out!
- Imagination outside the box. Reading more.
- Frequency
- Being more disciplined about working on my sermon early in the week.
- More prep time
- Speech coaching
- more time in preparation
- More opportunities to preach and/or regular (and honest, constructive) feedback from parishioners. Sorry, I know that's two things.
- better geographical access to preaching resources (education, training)
- More time
- Hearing more of my colleagues' sermons.
- Higher/more.comfortable office chair.
- video
- Better education options. We need the College of Preachers to return, but one in at least every province if not in every diocese.
- More time

APPENDIX K

Compiled answers to survey question #6

6. Please share three resources you regularly use in sermon preparation.

These were noted multiple times (#)

- Feasting on the Word (18)
- Text Week (18)
- Working Preacher (15)
- Commentaries (15)
 - Specifically noted: The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Augsburg commentary, N.T. Wright's commentary on the lectionary, Anchor Bible Dictionary, Kittle's abridged
- Newspapers/Current events/NYT/WSJ (10)
- Bible (11)
 - Specifically noted: NKJV, Orthodox Study Bible, RSV, Jewish Annotated NT, Common English Bible, NOAB , KJV or The Message to try to hear it differently.
- The New Interpreters Bible Commentary (9)
- Homiletic magazines (8)
 - Specifically: Synthesis, Tuesday Morning, Lectionary Homiletics
- Greek (5)
- Frederick Buechner (5)
- Prayer (4)
- Poetry (4)
- Girardian Reflections on the Lectionary (3)
- blueletterbible.org (3)
- Websites(7)
 - hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.org
 - <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/lectionaryindex.html>
 - www.sacredspace.ie
 - SermonCentral.Com
 - Living the Word Homiletic (on line)
- Bible study (2)
- ATLA (2)
- Informal discussion with other clergy (2)
- Seminary class notes (2)
- Sermons of others (2)
- Hebrew (2)
- Pop culture (2)

These were noted once:

- Podcasts from Duke Chapel
- Gutierrez's commentary from a liberation theology perspective
- NT gateway
- Conversations
- Stories collected over the years
- My life (including my unconscious and imagination and courage)
- People or texts specifically named:
 - Allen Verhey,
 - Walter Brueggemann
 - Barbara Brown Taylor
 - Eudora Welty
 - Richard Rohr
 - Martin Smith's "give them an experience of God" techniques
 - N.T. Wrights "Everyone" Bible series
 - Frank A. Thomas - They Like to Never Quit Praisin God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching
 - Thomas Long - The Witness of Preaching
 - Marvin McMickle - Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope
- Books by persons I consider good preachers
- Preaching the Word
- Center for excellence in preaching,
- Studying my context pastorally and in the wider community
- Writer's Almanac
- Book of Common Prayer
- Hymnal 1982
- Good preacher
- New Proclamation
- HQ: What does the Holy Spirit want the people of God to know in this place on this occasion?
- Language translation resources
- Feedback from spouse
- musicians/singers I listen to

APPENDIX L

Resources Recommended by Clergy Group Members

Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying NO to the Culture of Now*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

Chittister, Joan. *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1990.

Enns, Peter. *The Bible Tells Me So... Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable To Read It*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014.

Trueblood, Elton. *The Humor of Christ*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1975.

Williams, Rowan. *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Resources Recommended by The Rev. Dr. Bill Brosend

Brown, Brene. *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. Center City, MN: Hazleden, 2010.

Campbell, Charles. *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Chopp, Rebecca S. *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishing, 2002.

Long, Thomas. *Accompany them with Singing - The Christian Funeral*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.

Millbank, John. *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997.

Sanders, E.P. *Paul: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Shepherd, William H. *Without a Net: Preaching in the Paperless Pulpit*. Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, 2004.

Welch, Sharon. *A Feminists Ethic of RISK (Other Feminist Voices)*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.

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- Calahan, Kathleen A. *Projects That Matter: Successful Planning & Evaluation for Religious Organizations*. The Alban Institute, 2003.
- Graves, Mike ed. *What's The Matter With Preaching Today?* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Harvard Business Essentials. *Coaching and Mentoring: How to Develop Top Talent and Achieve Stronger Performance*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004.
- Hooke, Ruthanna B. *Transforming Preaching*. New York, NY: Church Publishing, Inc. 2010.
- Killen, Patricia O'Connell and de Beer, John. *The Art of Theological Reflection* Chestnut Ridge, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.
- Long, Thomas G. and Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs, eds. *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.
- Lose, David J. *Making Sense of Scripture: Big Questions About the Book of Faith*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.
- McClure, John S. ed. *Best Advice For Preaching*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998
- Proctor, Samuel D. *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994.
- Rueter, Alvin C. *Making Good Preaching Better: A Step-by-Step Guide to Scripture-Based, People Centered Preaching*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997.
- Stoddard, David A. with Tamasy, Robert J. *The Heart of Mentoring: Ten Proven Principles for Developing People to Their Fullest Potential*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2003.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Preaching Life*. Lanham, MA: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1993.

Vella, Jane. *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002.