

THE CAGED BIRD'S 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SONG: A HOMILETIC  
PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FROM THE PREACHING OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

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To the many individuals lost in translation, but who dare to sing  
and  
To those who help me sing through their unyielding support, understanding, and love

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## INTRODUCTION

Exposure and experience are of great importance in the pedagogics of preaching. As we learn how to cultivate the practice, there are basic principles and skills that need to be acquired, and a preacher can often be instructed in these basic principles. At the same time, there are also intangible aspects that are better described as being “caught” in the process of learning to preach and through exposure to preaching practices. In this regard, preaching is both “caught and taught.”

The content and organization of African American women’s preaching has been both underrepresented within and eclipsed by the larger categories of Black and women’s preaching. This underrepresentation of African American women’s preaching as a category of critical reflection and engagement mitigates both a lack of knowledge about their approach to preaching, and a limited ability to cultivate the “caught” nature of their preaching practices. Furthermore, it limits the ability to cultivate the “caught” nature of the preaching of others based on informed perspectives of varied approaches to preaching.

### **Preaching as “Caught and Taught”**

When engaging pedagogy and preaching, homileticians have addressed the need to retain both commonality and distinction in the practice of preaching. As it relates to the common aspects of the practice, there are skill sets and basic principles to learn and teach in preaching. The hope is that individuals not only learn the skills and basic principles, but to become effective in their use and implementation. The effective use and implementation of these skill sets and basic principles are what Thomas Long and Lenora

Tubbs Tisdale describe as “standards of excellence.”<sup>1</sup> The practice of preaching itself has established these standards of excellence over time, and these standards entail the best practices of admirable preaching. A competent preacher must have the ability to interpret her social contexts, Scripture, and tradition within a theological framework, and be both skillful and artful in the performance and delivery of the sermon. Being proficient within these standards of excellence creates commonality across both objectives in the process of learning and teaching preaching, and in the practice of preaching itself.

However, learning these practices and skills as scripted or discrete “how to’s” is not the goal within preaching. There is a way in which a competent preacher is able to operate in these standards of excellence through the ongoing process of astute decision-making in sermon development and delivery. John McClure calls this process of decision-making “good homiletical judgment”; cultivating this ability within preachers is the aim of the homiletics classroom.<sup>2</sup> As preachers learn to think critically about sermon development and preaching through the process of decision-making, there is an opportunity for individuals to become savvy and develop their own homiletical wisdom. The preacher’s homiletical wisdom and know-how is what allows preaching—even in its commonality across contexts and between individuals—to continue to possess a certain kind of distinctiveness across contexts and between preachers. Homiletical wisdom affirms, “There is not one way to do it”; rather, there are a variety of options. Astute homiletical judgment, creativity, and imagination are interworking aspects. Fostering astute homiletical judgment creates the opportunity for the preacher to experience and

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>2</sup> John S. McClure, "Homiletics," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm) (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 279.

own her agency as she engages the processes of decision-making in sermon development and delivery. In preaching, one strives for both the commonalities in admirable preaching and the distinction of subjectivity found in one's ability to use her wit and know-how. The use of wit and know-how connected to one's subjectivity is the substance of creative ingenuity.

Creative ingenuity combined with the deployment of best practices enables individuals to effectively play on the structures of sermon and preaching. Exposure to the variety of ways in which sermons take shape helps the preacher develop for herself the wit and know-how of discovering what works and how to use best practices within her own contexts. David Lose explains that the constant exposure to and immersion in good preaching helps individuals "make conscious and unconscious observations and connections and internalize norms about what makes effective preaching."<sup>3</sup> In essence, the exposure to good preaching models helps foster good preaching practices within individuals. Arguably, the exposure to ineffective preaching practices also helps individuals make the same connections and observations about what equates ineffective preaching. Therefore, in the process of learning preaching, that which can be explicitly taught and engaged through repetition and rote mechanics is not of sole importance. The intangible and non-descript best practices of preaching, which include creative ingenuity, can often be modeled and "caught" by observing the preaching of others.

Ideas of immersion and exposure run parallel to apprenticeship models within Black preaching traditions. Dale P. Andrews explains that the role of mentorship and

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<sup>3</sup> David Lose, "Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice," in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 45.

coaching of younger/newer preachers by more mature ones is an important aspect in the traditions of Black preaching—even as it has changed into what is at times more formal relationships today.<sup>4</sup> In apprenticeship models, the wisdom and experience of the mature preacher couples with the gifting and abilities of the apprentice in developing and training the individual in preaching practices and ministry. Apprenticeship is experientially based; the apprentice learns “on the job”<sup>5</sup> by preaching under the tutelage of the more mature preacher. However, the apprentice is not expected to mimic the preaching of the more mature preacher; instead, she is expected to understand and learn what admirable preaching is even as he cultivates his distinct preaching gifts and abilities. Within apprentice models, the commonality and distinction of preaching are held in close proximity to one another, as the individuality of the apprentice and wisdom of the master-tutor remain in close proximity.

### **In Search of Models and Tutors**

Variety in exposure and immersion becomes all the more significant when helping individuals who are traditionally marginalized in pulpit spaces learn and adopt practices that work for their particular preaching ministries. Daniel Schipani, in his work *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*,<sup>6</sup> forges a model of transformational learning in religious education, particularly as it relates to marginal groups. Schipani offers an approach to pedagogy founded in the encounter and

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<sup>4</sup> Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel S. Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988).

confrontation of religious education and liberation theology. One of the first steps he advocates in transformational learning is listening to the faith expressions of marginal individuals.<sup>7</sup> For Schipani, engaging the marginal as theological subjects is important because it acknowledges them as “direct and indirect authors of the theological task,” and acknowledges their possession of special authority based on their ways of knowing, being, and doing faith.<sup>8</sup> Schipani’s proposal is based on a way of knowing founded within “action and critical reflection.”<sup>9</sup> He contends that the learning and teaching process of “action and reflection in which people’s religious experience—especially the faith of the oppressed—is taken seriously into account and can amount to both doing theology and training for all forms of ministry.”<sup>10</sup> Through encountering the “other” and her way of knowing and being, we learn a way of knowing and being; a way that may be particularly counter to the normative lens. Similar to Schipani, bell hooks attends to this trajectory of transformational and liberating pedagogy in what she calls “decolonizing” the mind through teaching that “transforms and transgresses” biases in education.<sup>11</sup> For hooks, individuals, especially the disenfranchised, must learn to question the biases of the dominant norm in education, and teachers must teach in deliberate ways that seek to further democracy and justice.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 219. Schipani's theory of pedagogy is founded in Paulo Friere's philosophy of education. For further exploration of Paulo Friere's understanding of the relationship between pedagogy and liberation, see: Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez, *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation* (New York: Continuum, 1989); Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Continuum Impacts (London; New York: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, 224.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>11</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 26-28.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

For preaching, the immediate consideration is the faith expression of sermon, and the intersection with transformational forms of learning and teaching for marginal individuals. Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson describe the ironic contradiction that occurs when women are silenced by others or silence themselves as a means of preventing separation from others. As they silence themselves to prevent separation from others, women actually separate themselves from their own “desires and feelings”—including their selves and voices.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, preaching as a form of giving voice, giving self, and being voiced becomes a difficult task for those who have distanced themselves or been distanced from their voice through silence. This issue is compounded when those who are silenced no longer have robust language constructions that express their experiences, feelings, or ways of being and knowing, because the individual is “suffocated by the confines of the ‘language world’ she or he is given.”<sup>14</sup> When individuals who struggle for voice hear those with whom they find commonality and similarity give voice, they too find room to do the same. Therefore, as exposure to best preaching practices is important, variety in those practices is equally imperative when attending to matters of democracy, justice, and learning.

In experiencing a variety of preaching models, individuals are able to find distant mentors, tutors, and master teachers in the practice where they may not have accessibility to those models in their immediate spheres. For African American preaching women in the preaching classroom, the dominant preaching have been those of African American men and Caucasian American women.

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Lin Hudson and Mary Donovan Turner, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 85.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

Teresa Fry Brown argues the importance of African American clergywomen having role models and mentors in preaching who are also African American women.<sup>15</sup> The foundation of her argument is largely based on the particularity of obstacles and experiences of African American preaching women. Fry Brown recounts the words of these women as they speak of their “proclamation mentors and role models.”<sup>16</sup> Female family members and elders, local and nationally recognized pastors (including men and women), and teachers were named as role models and mentors for their preaching ministries. Within these lists of mentors it was not unusual for the women to list several distant role models as opposed to immediately accessible mentors. Fry Brown notes that, when compared to African American men who are the sons of preachers, African American women are less likely to be “groomed” from a young age into preaching ministries.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the presence of other African American women as role models and mentors in the preaching ministries of African American women is of real significance.

Looking ahead, the sermons of African American women provide a narrow window into the preaching of African American women. This window increases the wisdom bank of distant preacher tutors, and potentially interrupts the dominant narratives of preaching in transformational and liberating ways.

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<sup>15</sup> Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 72.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

## **Turning to the Wisdom Bearers**

We have yet to answer the questions, “In what ways are African American women creating and inventing in their preaching?” “What is the shape and content of their preaching?” and “What can we learn from them about preaching, in terms of better assisting instruction for preaching?” We cannot adequately attend to any of these questions until we explore the content of sermons of African American women with homiletical theory and methodology in view. As we engage the sermons of African American women, we not only learn more about their preaching, but also learn information that then shapes our methodologies and theories of preaching.

In the following pages, I explore some distinct characteristics of African American women’s sermon composition, as discovered by placing the sermons of African American women in juxtaposition with homiletic literature. I give attention to literature on Black preaching and women’s ways of preaching, specifically because of their intersections with the persona of Black and woman. This is an appreciative inquiry into the preaching of African American women. The hope is that African American women’s preaching is acknowledged as a valuable practice that has the potential to make significant contributions to the instruction and practice of preaching at present day.

Chapter I situates the African American preaching woman in relationship to cultural constructions and understandings of preaching, as well to the constructions and understandings of preaching in preaching literature. Of foremost importance is consideration for how the social location of African American women requires that their preaching not be absorbed into the categories of Black preaching and women’s preaching. Looking at the historical location of these women within traditional African

American faith communities reveals their disproportionate representation in leadership capacity, including the occupation of pulpit spaces. Thus, what we have come to know, understand, and hear as Black preaching has been mediated via the bodies of African American men, of which African American women have none. This real and imagined vision of the Black preacher is what continues to shape literature on Black preaching. Also, as women's preaching literature has increased since the 1980s, there is a lack of diversity in the women's experiences from which theoretical constructions about preaching are made. In this regard, women's preaching literature that intentionally engages homiletic theory and methodology remains primarily undergirded by Caucasian American women's preaching and feminist theologies. Therefore, the outsider-within location of African American preaching women within religious spaces is re-inscribed in their outsider-within location within preaching literature.

In Chapter II I offer creative ingenuity as a means of engaging the preaching and sermons of African American women, establishing value in the exploration of their preaching for learning and instruction in preaching without necessitating the potential false dualism in labels of accommodation and resistance. The categories of accommodation and resistance are tempting ones due to the historical lack of privilege and acceptance afforded women in pulpit spaces. A premature conclusion about African American women's preaching is that their preaching either continues to accommodate the structures that inhibit their full thriving and acceptance as authentic preachers in their own right, or that their preaching actively resists the historical, political, and cultural power dynamics that inherently inhibit their full thriving and acceptance as preachers. Creative ingenuity allows us to account for both accommodation and resistance without

necessitating placing value in either category. In this chapter, I demonstrate that beginning with a from-the-ground-up approach through sermon analysis enables us to better understand current preaching practices and then more astutely move towards theoretical constructions, including those constructions that explore aspects of accommodation and resistance.<sup>18</sup> The latter half of Chapter II builds on an understanding of the sermon as a type of genre for the purposes of describing how this research pursues analytic approaches to our preachers' sermons. As an established genre, a sermon is expected to engage Scripture (*engaging Scripture*), engage the familiar experience of listeners (*using familiar experience*), convey some significant message of truth (*conveying truth*), and contain theological claims (*doing God-talk*).

Chapters III and IV explore the use of these four aspects in thirty sermons by seven African American clergywomen. Within each chapter, I return to homiletic literature to explain the distinctive aspects of the sermon content and construction. Chapter III explores our preachers' use of familiar experience and engagement with Scripture. Through thick description, I explain how clergywomen draw upon their knowledge of everyday life to make connections with both their listeners and with Scripture. These preachers' ability to resource communal language, memory, and ability create a form of communal language and memory that is their point for entering the construction of meaning within their sermons. Similarly, they use that which comes out of their knowledge of the community in conjunction with their own experiences for their

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<sup>18</sup> For a description of Qualitative Research Design, see John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007); Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002).

different purposes of using Scripture. This engagement with Scripture includes the use of Scripture in close and more distant proximities to everyday lived experiences.

Chapter IV draws out themes that arise in the ways our preachers convey their messages and their engagement in theological reflection. The major purpose is to understand the preachers' operative theology(ies)<sup>19</sup> as expressed in sermons, and the reflexive relationship that theology has with the significant message of the sermon. As it relates to conveying truth, I attend to our preachers' communally-assertive framework of message development and its affect. As it relates to God-talk, I pursue how their very immanent understandings of God's involvement and God's power influences their articulations of what it means to live with God and to live with others. The theological themes are of significance because one's theological worldview shapes and helps determine the broader sermon's content and message, including the preacher's engagement with her larger social sphere of operation.

Although four specific elements of sermons are attended to in Chapters III and IV, these are not unrelated categories. In reality, these categories are seen as working together and having mutual influence on one another. For instance, a preacher who understands an important aspect of God's justice as in the here and now for humanity may engage social issues that she views as pressing, such as race, gender, and sexuality. A sermon by this woman may appear more heavily driven by these social issues while expressing strong associations between what she views as sin and redemption in the here

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<sup>19</sup> Operative theology denotes the theological beliefs out of which individuals speak and function in contrast to the full methodological understanding of God, sin and redemption, and humanity as expressed in systematic theologies. Here, the major premise is that individuals often speak and act in symbols and signs according to their most valued theological beliefs. Granted, there are indeed instances when symbols and signs do not match articulated beliefs and, in these instances, the goal in preaching is to create congruency between the two categories.

and now and sin and redemption in Scripture. Such a preacher may view sin as analogous to discrimination, while justice entails concrete action to expose and eradicate such discrimination. Making connections between the categories and how they function together within the sermons is the work of the final chapter.

Chapter V has a distinctively pedagogical orientation, as its purpose is to resource preaching as a form of creative ingenuity. I present a homiletic practical theology for sermon development, which has its origins in the distinctive qualities discovered within our preachers' sermons. The creative ingenuity of these African American preaching women is used as the means for helping others explore their creative ingenuity within the processes of sermon development. I make direct links between the ways in which our preachers use familiar experience, engage Scripture, convey truth, and do God-talk, and how we pursue the use of familiar experience, engagement with Scripture, explore conveying truth, and formulate God-talk in sermon development. The conclusions of Chapter V are made with the hope of continuing a reflexive relationship between the homiletical practices of African American women and teaching individuals how to preach.

## CHAPTER I

### CAGED:

#### SITUATING THE BLACK PREACHING WOMAN AND HER PREACHING

“The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power.”<sup>20</sup>

### Introduction

The concurrent existence of *Black*, *woman*, and *preacher* reflexively shapes African American women’s preaching styles and sermon content. The experiences of being Black, woman, and preacher simultaneously converge in the world of the African American preaching woman, establishing a particular persona. This simultaneous convergence brings with it listener expectations. The experiences of Black women, as extensions of social location, and the expectations of their preaching inevitably influence the content and style of their sermons. The persona and expectations of being a Black woman who preaches makes the sermons of African American women worthy of close examination, apart from their contemporaries and the sermons of their contemporaries.

African American men and European American women are important contemporaries when considering the African American woman who preaches. They are significant contemporaries primarily because African American men and European American women remain the major interlocutors within the categories of Black and

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<sup>20</sup> Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House, 2002), 272.

women's ways of preaching, respectively. The lack of nuance in both categories inadequately accounts for African American preaching women, who are both Black and woman. For this reason, African American men and European American women are important contemporaries of African American preaching women; not in naïve exclusion of their other contemporaries, but due to established categories of preaching and the sources engaged for written works about preaching.

The preaching of African American women must be considered a viable resource for literature and theories that earnestly engage learning and teaching preaching. The intersection of gender, race, and class produces a significant *intersectionality*<sup>21</sup> in the lives and religious practices of African American women. This intersectionality often relegates Black women to an outsider-within position, not only in life at-large but also in lives in their communities of faith. Within the contexts of ministry of some African American women, dynamics of power and politics have historically led to conceptualizing the “Black preacher” as Black and male in rather robust narratives and images. The robust depiction of the Black preacher as specifically male sharply contrasts with an underdeveloped, if not lacking, image of the Black preaching woman. This underdeveloped image of the Black preaching woman has led to underdeveloped understandings of African American women's preaching. Evidence of these underdeveloped aspects of both the Black preaching woman and her preaching is found within their absorption into the categories of Black and women's preaching via limited distinction within the categories.

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<sup>21</sup> The links between the categories of race, class, and gender are named as intersectionality, recognizing that multiple forms of oppression are not necessarily reducible one from another. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Rev. 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 18.

## **Constructing the Cage: Race, Class, Gender<sup>22</sup>**

Race, class, and gender are influential in various degrees in the experiences of African American women. These ongoing influences are due to the historical realities of chattel slavery and domestic servitude in the United States. The Black woman makes proclamation, and preaches as a part of a group that has experienced the underbelly of race, class, and gendered discriminations in overt forms while still navigating these realities in a sometimes less overt form on a daily basis. In *Daughters of Thunder: Black Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, historian Beverly Collier-Thomas posits that “no other group of Americans has experienced multiple oppressions based on race, sex, and often class and color, as much as Black women have.”<sup>23</sup>

The field of homiletics has increasingly engaged the importance of treating preaching as a task that takes shape within the context of lived experiences. An increasing number of texts engage preaching alongside ethnic, gendered, and cultural categories and theories. In this regard, if we are to engage the preaching of African American women on its own terms, we cannot adequately do so without considering how their lived experiences are shaped by the intersections of race, class, and gender. The experiences of present-day African American women are connected to a history that differentiates their experiences of racism from those of Black men and their experiences of sexism from those of white women.

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<sup>22</sup> The term “cage” is used as a metaphor to represent the (sometimes) intangible constrictions present in the lives and ministries of African American clergywomen based on race, class, and gender discrimination.

<sup>23</sup> Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 9.

One aspect of African American women's history in North America is the experience of being a captured—or *caged*—group for the social and economic gain of other individuals. The most recognizable aspects of this captivity are in the transatlantic slave trade. The less visible, but no less stigmatizing aspects of being *caged* are the roles of domestic servitude that followed the era of slavery. The realities of slavery and servitude are portraits of the social categories to which others have assigned Black women based on race and gender. Indeed, both institutions were concrete realities, and continue to loom as metaphors for the systems of social control that still mitigate African American women's struggles for social equality.<sup>24</sup>

Social control of African American women is maintained through their being assigned to subordinate positions that have political, ideological, and economic dimensions. For instance, African American women have often been assigned the face of the “welfare Queen” and government assistance programs.<sup>25</sup> This assignment disproportionately portrays the amount of African American women who receive government aid, narrowly contriving government aid as food assistance programs only

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<sup>24</sup> In *White Woman's Christ, Black Woman's Jesus*, Grant argues that the historical realities of slavery and Black women in domestic service most adequately demonstrate the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in the lives of Black woman; Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 6. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins notes that Black women's oppression has entailed a system of social control, which consists of economic, political, and ideological dimensions that result in Black women being kept in an “assigned, subordinate place.” Collins describes the economic, political, and ideological dimensions of this system of social control in the following way: a) The economic dimension entails “the exploitation of Black women's labor essential to U.S. capitalism...the “iron pots and kettles” symbolizing Black women's long-standing ghettoization in service occupations—represents the economic dimensions of oppression”; b) “The political dimension of oppression has denied African-American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens”; c) The ideological dimension is described as “controlling images applied to Black women that originated during the slave era [that] attest to the ideological dimensions of U.S. Black women's oppression... (i.e. mammy, jezebel, & breeder)”; Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> John Blake, "Return of the 'Welfare Queen'," CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/23/politics/welfare-queen/index.html>.

while ignoring other programs such as Medicaid, social security disability, tax credits, and government-issued student loans and Pell grants from which many more individuals benefit.<sup>26</sup> African American women's assigned social locations have often led to their being caged through the erasure, invisibility, and controlled significance of their presence in history.<sup>27</sup>

The limited access to power afforded Black women to record and document their own history perpetuates ideologies about them as opposed to promoting their writing and inscribing their own identities. As it immediately relates to Black preaching women, we see this limited power in the sparse historical documents of Black women's preaching

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<sup>26</sup> "Half of Americans Getting Government Aid Swear They've Never Used It," Good Culture, [http://www.good.is/post/half-of-americans-getting-government-aid-swear-they-ve-never-used-government-programs?utm\\_content=prev-next&utm\\_medium=post-page-bottom](http://www.good.is/post/half-of-americans-getting-government-aid-swear-they-ve-never-used-government-programs?utm_content=prev-next&utm_medium=post-page-bottom); Sakuma, Paul, "Record Number in Government Anti-Poverty Programs," USA Today, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-08-30-1Asafetynet30\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-08-30-1Asafetynet30_ST_N.htm).

<sup>27</sup>In "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers traces the absorption of the African American gendered-female in American discourse, in view of the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its reverberations on a once "free" people and their captors in "historically ordained discourse." As a captive people, Black bodies, male and female, equaled *slave*, *livestock*, and *property* without human, social, or sexual difference. In this regard, the dominating culture, *Eurocentric*, did not recognize the categories of woman and man as it related to Black bodies in human community or existence. This lack of recognition is further exemplified and demonstrated in the lack of paternal rights and "family structure" given Black women and men. Black women "reproduced" as property and were not admitted into the category of "womanhood" as they were simultaneously denied "motherhood" by the threat and practice of their offspring being taken away, sold, or traded. The ideological understanding of Black bodies and Black female bodies, perpetuated by an Eurocentric patriarchal understanding of family and womanhood, shaped discourses and misrepresentations of not only the Black family structure, but African American women both inside and outside that structure. The result has been descriptions assigned to Black women as opposed to African American women controlling their own descriptions. Two examples of these descriptions are the Black female as matriarch and the patriarchal family structure, as exposed in Moynihan's 1965 controversial *Negro Family* (also known as the *Moynihan Report*). Spillers notes that the narrative of African American women is one of "mother and mother-dispossessed." This places her "out of the traditional symbols of female gender," making her a "different social subject." The African American woman exists as a different female gendered being than women of the dominant culture as it relates to her presence in American discourse and history. This is primarily due to the influences of oppression as it relates to her race; Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Back, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

and sermons that predate the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> The result is the perpetuation of descriptors given to Black women, or none at all, as opposed to descriptions and documentation of the lives of Black women written by Black women.

Since we do not always have African American women's voices in direct conversation with subject matters pertaining to their lives, the other issue at hand is when and how these women enter conversations that relate to race and gender. bell hooks contends in *Ain't I A Woman* that Black women have been "socialized out of existence" in America, due to their rare recognition as a group that is separate from Black men, and the exclusion from the larger group of woman.<sup>29</sup> The fulcrum of this differentiation can be seen in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries' social movements.<sup>30</sup> The fight for Black social advancement fought against racism often equaled Black male advancement. Furthermore, the elite women's movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was often plagued with ideas rooted in Victorian ideals of true womanhood, which were not afforded to Black or lower-class women.<sup>31</sup> In the Black and women's movements, Black men and white women spoke for Black women without differentiation from their experiences, as it related to the experience of being Black or woman. In this regard,

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<sup>28</sup> See Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*.

<sup>29</sup> bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 7.

<sup>30</sup> For additional information on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century social movements and their exclusion of Black women, see Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*; Angela Y. Davis and Joy James, *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* by Blackwell Readers (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*.

<sup>31</sup> Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 9.

African American women, as both Black and woman, remain(ed) as outsiders-within<sup>32</sup> movements that have been classified as “Black” and “woman,” as their voices are not directly engaged in conversations that pertain to their existence.

The in-between space of outsider-within marks the social location of Black women as both racialized and gendered beings. The intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the lives of Black women creates a differentiation from sexism as experienced by white women, and racism as experienced by Black men, which goes unrecognized until Black women speak for themselves. The experiences of African American women must not be blindly absorbed into the discrete categories of Black and woman, lest we continue to render the experience of these women silent.

Even as race, class, and gender are common contributing factors in the lives of African American women, thus requiring the categories of Black and woman to be interrogated more fully, we cannot assume a common experience amongst African American women. All African American women do not respond to and experience the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the same manner. Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought*,<sup>33</sup> suggests that Black women in the United States have a diversity of responses to race, class, and gendered discrimination, which impacts their everyday lives differently, even as the core themes exist. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are a variety of Black women’s experiences across different socioeconomic classes, and with

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<sup>32</sup> In her 1984 book, *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde discusses how “in a patriarchal power system, where whiter-skinned privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and white women are not the same.” Also, she continues to explain the mislabeling of Black women as “anti-Black” when they are expressing ‘anti-sexist’ sentiments in the battle against “racial erasure” that both Black men and women face; Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 118-20.

<sup>33</sup>Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 25.

these different experiences comes different forms of “outsider-within” privileges. The ongoing iterations of race, class, and gendered discrimination in the lives of Black women, as opposed to symmetry in the experience of discrimination, allows us to retain social location as an important starting point in understanding the lives and practices of African American women. In essence, the term *cage* may have a variety of forms for African American women, but is no less pertinent in understanding their experiences and social location.

### **Faint Choruses: The Image of the “Black Preacher”**

#### Gendered Politics & Church As A Foundation

The larger gendered politics present within African American communities are evident on a smaller scale in the distribution of power within faith communities. A varying acceptance of white patriarchal ideals of social stratification is present within African American churches.<sup>34</sup> The acceptance of white patriarchal social stratifications has led to understanding gender relations within constructs of dominance and submission

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<sup>34</sup> See bell hooks, "Plantation Patriarchy" in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Manning Marable, "Grounding with My Sisters: Patriarchy and the Exploitation of Black Women," in *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*; Cheryl Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Marcia Riggs, *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003).

over and against equality and mutuality.<sup>35</sup> This understanding of gender relations is compounded as it intersects with theological themes.

As communities adopt theological ideas and explications of suffering from Early Christian traditions, they simultaneously solidify problematic gender relations and the injustices perpetuated by such understandings of gender and power.<sup>36</sup> The Early Christian traditions rely on themes of male dominance, righteousness vs. unrighteousness, and sanctified suffering. The acceptance and adoption of theological ideals and explications of suffering inherent in the Christian tradition has yet to be *fully* interrogated under the guise of liberation and its implications on the lives and status of Black women.<sup>37</sup> This lack of robust interrogation of the tradition by some African American faith communities results in ongoing gendered power imbalances within these same communities. Many

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<sup>35</sup> The danger of generalizations must also be noted. Historically, there have been African American men who sought and prioritized the equal liberation of African American women alongside of African American women, and there continue to be men in the present day who are allies with the struggles of African American women for the ongoing empowerment of African American communities. See Alexander Crummell's "Address to the Freedman's Aid Society" (1883), Frederick Douglass, "I Am a Radical Woman Suffrage Man" (1888), and, for more contemporary engagements, see Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Chanta M. Haywood, *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823\*1913* (Columbia, OH: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> Womanist Scholars have noted this lack of integration of the Christian tradition for the lives of Black women and have taken to seriously engaging a liberative trajectory within Christianity that places Black women at its center for the emancipation of the whole community. For additional resources see Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006); Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, The Bishop Henry McNeal Turner Studies in North American Black Religion (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994); *What's Faith Got to Do with It?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005); Teresa L. Fry Brown, *God Don't Like Ugly: African American Women Handing on Spiritual Values* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000); "An African American Woman's Perspective: Renovating Sorrow's Kitchen," in *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Christine M. Smith (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998); Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); Emilie Maureen Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, The Bishop Henry McNeal Turner Studies in North American Black Religion (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

churches continue to relegate the position of African American women to the status of outsider-within.

The symptomatic issues of the intra-group tension between African American women and men are demonstrated through the struggles of women who preach, pastor, serve, and attend predominantly-Black Protestant churches in United States.<sup>38</sup> Women account for the largest base in Black church congregations, yet are disproportionately represented in roles of pastoral leadership. While women are often excluded from positions of primary leadership along with ministries of teaching and preaching at senior levels, women are 'allowed' to pursue the positions of administrative assistants, teachers of children and of some adult Sunday School classes, and leaders of women's auxiliaries; they are also expected to fully support if not undergird the financial vitality of the churches. Both men and women restrict the participation of women within churches, yet their participation is vital within these churches for the institution's flourishing and continued existence.

Unequal power distributions have plagued Black religious institutions, which are Black women's historical contexts of ministry. The institutions have an uneven ratio of male leadership in view of a predominantly female congregation. Subsequently, the Black preacher and pastor have remained predominantly male. The preference and dominance of male privilege within African American congregations in the United States

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<sup>38</sup> Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women—: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*; Riggs, *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*; Cheryl Gilkes, "There Is a Work for Each One of Us: The Socio-Theology of the Rev Florence Spearing Randolph," in *How Long This Road: Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln*, ed. Alton B. Pollard and L. H. Welchel (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 131-4; Delores C. Carpenter, "A Time to Honor: A Portrait of African American Clergywomen," in *How Long This Road: Race, Religion and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln*, ed. Alton B. Pollard and L. H. Welchel (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

has also shaped the description and understanding of who the Black preacher is/should be and what the Black sermon is/should be. Thus, African American women who aspire to preach have limited historical cultural images of Black women who proclaim as both preachers and pastors. The trickledown effect is an overwhelming understanding of Black preaching that emulates the preaching of the Black male, whom the Black woman preacher is not.

### The Image of the Black Preacher As Historical Ghost

Black and male are the immediate images and meters that measure the rhetorical performance of the Black sermon, even if merely at the subconscious level. H. Beecher Hicks, Jr.'s *Images of the Black Preacher: The Man Nobody Knows*<sup>39</sup> is a dated work, but remains relevant for engaging characteristics of the cultural image of the “Black preacher” and the image’s perpetuation in various forms today. One consistency throughout Hick’s work and analysis is the “maleness” of the preacher as it relates to his reader, the cultural sources that prove his claims, and the preacher he recovers in both his contemporary and historical contexts. The legitimate practices and function of the preacher within the context of Black religious life have influenced images of the Black preacher, as well as the descriptive and prescriptive caricatures, judgments, and assumptions of his skeptics and genuine supporters.<sup>40</sup> Hicks writes: “The images of the Black preacher, both historical and contemporary, are at once real and imagined, imposed and assumed, valid and false. The images are products of distorted history, racist

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<sup>39</sup> H. Beecher Hicks, *Images of the Black Preacher: The Man Nobody Knows* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1977).

<sup>40</sup> Hicks explains that the Black preacher’s main functions are understood as proclaiming the gospel, “parenting of the extended family through the Black church, and the empowering of persons in the context of congregation and community”; *ibid.*, 19.

stereotype, and regretfully, the minister's own making."<sup>41</sup> Images of the Black preacher have negative and positive characteristics based on a skewed history, racist stereotypes, and the actions of preachers themselves. Our understanding of the figure is both "real and imagined"; and, over time, the "images" have converged into one predominate "image" that is unequivocally Black and male. We encounter "real and imagined" constructions of this preacher in the bodies and narratives of actual preachers, in American literature, as well as in contemporary media and artistic expressions.

The image of the Black preacher originates in the "slave preacher." Notable characteristics of the slave preacher have continuity with characteristics of prominent Black preachers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century Civil Rights Era. The slave preacher is a controversial figure. Though the slave master often used him to control his fellow enslaved brothers and sisters, the slave preacher also inspired and reinvigorated hope in the slave community to resist assumptions about their inhumanity.<sup>42</sup> The ability to both control and incite resistance was rooted in the preacher's rhetorical prowess—often alongside his illiteracy.<sup>43</sup> The slave preacher was a "leader and communicator" whose legend was solidified in slave narratives.<sup>44</sup> The marks of leadership, communication, and rhetorical prowess exhibited by the slave preacher can be identified with prominent

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Albert Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 14; see also "A Profile of the Slave Preacher" in Hicks, *Images of the Black Preacher: The Man Nobody Knows*, 38-9.

<sup>43</sup> Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*; Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*, 14; see also "A Profile of the Slave Preacher" in Hicks, *Images of the Black Preacher: The Man Nobody Knows*, 38-9.

<sup>44</sup> Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*, 14; Hicks, *Images of the Black Preacher: The Man Nobody Knows*, 38-9.

public preacher figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, whose ministries sparked larger societal interest in Black preaching.<sup>45</sup> To some degree, both King and Malcolm X became the contemporary prototypes of the Black preacher and Black preaching. These contemporary prototypes of the Black preacher continued the legacy of a male leader who is a great communicator with rhetorical prowess.

As the slave preacher and more prominent public figures influence our conceptualization of the Black preacher, American literature leads us most keenly into the image of the Black preacher as a cultural product described and resignified through cultural productions. Literature captures the bodily performance of the Black preacher and the content of the Black sermon, and writers caricature the preacher as a Black man with rhetorical prowess, a voice of thunder, and unmet imagination that weaves the biblical text with the realities of lived Black experience. In the preface to *God's Trombone: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*<sup>46</sup> James Weldon Johnson describes the Black preacher as “above all an orator” who has the ability to move congregations to “ecstasy by the rhythmic intoning of sheer incoherencies,” while using the modulation of his voice to perform poetic language.<sup>47</sup> In his work, Johnson portrays the poetic language and performance of the Black preacher and sermon in seven poems.

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<sup>45</sup> Cleophus James LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 32-3.

<sup>46</sup> James Weldon Johnson and Henry Louis Gates, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, Rev. ed., Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> James Weldon Johnson explains that the Black preacher is “... above all an orator, and in good measure an actor. He knew the secret of oratory, that at bottom it is a progression of rhythmic words more than it is anything else. Indeed, I have witnessed congregations moved to ecstasy by the rhythmic intoning of sheer incoherencies. He was a master of all the modes of eloquence. He often possessed a voice that was a marvelous instrument, a voice he could modulate from a sepulchral whisper to a crashing thunder clap.... His imagination was bold and unfettered.... At such times his language was not prose but poetry...”; *ibid.*, 11.

And, just as Johnson emulates the Black preacher in poetry, Black women write about the Black preacher in literary fiction. Black women's fiction has been a place for women to explore their experiences of Black womanhood in America, as well as a means to disclose facts in fiction. The literature encapsulates the history of Black preaching traditions, while it also reveals the characteristics used to describe Black preaching in its caricatures and homiletics to date.

In 1934, Zora Neale Hurston reproduced the historical image of the preacher in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*,<sup>48</sup> a novel that was based on her own contemporary experiences. Hurston incorporates her field notes of a country preacher into the depiction of a final sermon given by the novel's protagonist, John Buddy Pearson. John's sermon is entitled "The Wounds of Jesus" and is based on Isaiah 53.<sup>49</sup> In it, Hurston inscribes aspects of slow delivery, celebration, imaginative language, intonation, rhythm, whooping, and musicality.<sup>50</sup>

Hurston links the musicality in John's sermon with a song he leads the congregation in just prior to preaching.<sup>51</sup> John Buddy and his preaching are characterized as igniting the congregation while the congregation is described in turn as "bearing up" almost

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<sup>48</sup>Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel* (New York: Perennial Library, 1990).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>50</sup> See Henry Mitchell, "African American Preaching" in William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, Rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008); Evans E. Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*.

<sup>51</sup> Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel*, 174, 81.

continuously throughout the sermon.<sup>52</sup> Hurston's description parallels Johnson's description of the Black preacher moving the congregation to "ecstasy." She describes John beginning his sermon in a "clear, calm voice,"<sup>53</sup> followed by hesitation, and eventually moving to rhythmic celebration. Hurston uses grammatical constructions of dashes to demonstrate aspects of slow delivery and voice modulation in the progression of John's sermon. For example, in one instance, John says: "I can see-eee-ee De Mountains fall to their rocky knees when he cried...."<sup>54</sup> Hurston also uses grammatical constructions to portray the rhythmic nature and verbal intonation of preaching:

When you are alone to yourself  
When yo' heart is burnt with fire, ha!  
When de blood is lopin' thru yo' veins  
Like de iron monasters (monsters) on de rail  
Look into dat upper chamber, ha!  
We notice at de supper table  
As He gazed upon His Friends, ha!  
His eyes flowin' wid tears, ha! He said  
My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death, ha!  
For this night, ha!  
One of you shall betray me, ha!...<sup>55</sup>

Here, Hurston's use of short phrases and "ha!" signify hard pauses in the sermon's height of emotive celebration, which is rooted in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The reader can almost hear John preaching. Just as Johnson does in his own text, Hurston portrays the codified image of the Black preacher, based on historical and contemporary experiences of the Black male. Ironically, Hurston's contemporary descriptors remain

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 174, 77.

continuous with our present-day descriptions of Black preaching, even as the bodies may not be named as overtly male in current literature.

As the image of the Black preacher and the Black sermon is predominantly caricatured as Black and male, when and where the Black preaching woman occurs in literature is striking. Roxanne Mountford describes the American Protestant pulpit as a male-dominated rhetorical space that has excluded and considered female bodies as weaker and inferior.<sup>56</sup> The embodied male has rendered control over pulpit spaces. Mountford notes that when women are characterized as preachers in American literature they most often appear preaching “outside” of the pulpit space.<sup>57</sup> We can see this phenomenon in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, in the preaching of Baby Suggs, Holy. Baby Suggs, Holy is the classic Black woman itinerant, who takes an audience where her Spirit goes and with whomever’s heart is open. Her platform is often a “huge-flat-rock.”<sup>58</sup> In these kinds of depictions of preaching, the male’s control as orator and author of “sanctioned pulpit” preaching is exemplified.

Following the present-day narratives of historical descriptions and literature, the Black preacher is regularly cast as Black and male in television, film, and theatre, including serious drama and comedic satires. In the 1985 film production of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Shug Avery’s father, the local preacher, sits in the center of a predominantly female congregation. The title of the 1996 film “The Preacher’s Wife”

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<sup>56</sup> Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 8-10.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>58</sup> See *ibid.*; Judylin S. Ryan “Spirituality and/as Ideology in Black Women’s Literature: The Preaching of Maria Stewart and Baby Suggs, Holy,” in Beverly Mayne & Pamela J. Walker Kienzele, *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

inherently assumes and underscores that the preacher is male. We see similar occurrences in Tyler Perry's production of screenplays and movies, such as in "I Can Do Bad All By Myself" (2009); here, the preacher has a voice of thunder, a hum (and oftentimes a whoop), and his strong presence is unequivocally male. A rare depiction of the Black preacher and pastor as woman appears in the 2003 film "Deliver Us From Eva." However, she appears only briefly, standing *outside* of the church to greet the members of the congregation. Not a single scene depicts her as preaching amongst the congregation. Thus, although the image of the Black preacher is rooted in historical narratives and practice, contemporary cultural vehicles continue to disseminate the image.

The image of the Black preacher remains a ghostly figure in the preaching ministries of African American women. This historical ghost is perpetuated by gender politics within African American Christian communities, real preaching bodies, and cultural productions. The image has been narrowly contrived as a Black male with rhetorical prowess, who has the ability to perform what is recognized as "the Black sermon." The image of the Black preacher is elusive at times, but not extinct. The image lingers and influences the expectations of what it means to be Black and preacher, regardless of whether the image is actively adopted, resisted, or acknowledged within a particular community. Black women are competing with an established image when they preach; the ideal image, in its maleness, is inherently other than who they are. Thus, African American women are potentially still viewed outside the category of preacher. As a result, they negotiate a space for themselves and their voices across various contexts

of ministry. This specific outside status of Black women who preach creates experiences that are different from their Black male and white female contemporaries.

### **Black, Woman, & Homiletics**

The outsider-within position of the Black preaching woman is not only evident in the social constructions of the Black preacher, but it has become a part of homiletic literature. The Black preaching woman has possessed an invisible or often faint presence in extant literature about preaching. At this point in time, literature on preaching that engages Black preaching and women's ways of preaching for pedagogical, methodological, and theoretical purposes is dominated by an assumed presence of the styles and practices of Black men and white women. There is minimum differentiation between Black men and Black women in the category of Black preaching. Similarly, there is minimum differentiation between white women and Black women within the category of women's preaching.<sup>59</sup> In this regard, the African American woman who seeks to learn to preach and preaches is yet again left between the two categories of Black and woman.

While Black women's tactics and practices of preaching may resemble those of Black men and white women, Black women's social location as outsiders-within make their sermons both worthy of investigation and differentiates their artifacts from those of

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<sup>59</sup> I use Caucasian American women here, because women's homiletic literature has been largely influenced by white feminist theorists and homileticians.

white women and Black men.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, this outsider-within location has promise for expanding current conversations about Black preaching and women's preaching.

### Black Homiletics

Homiletic literature gives attention to the Black sermon and the sermon's relationship and function alongside a community's experience. Writers have engaged sermons by Black preachers as literary and oratory art forms which have held the potential for resistance and invigorating hope; functioned as a different form of literacy for a dispossessed people in its oral-aural form; utilized experience as authority to speak about life, God, and humanity; and engaged the imaginative spirit and mind for moral change.<sup>61</sup> Also, there has been significant attention given to the historical documents of Black preaching in essays and sermon anthologies.<sup>62</sup> Finally, homiletic literature has developed around identifying practices of Black preaching as a category, with some attention to method and theory and with a major emphasis on descriptive hermeneutics.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Collier-Thomas advances this argument as it relates to the preaching of pioneering Black women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. She states that the primary difference is that these women were for the explicit advancement of Black women, which was made evident in their sermons and papers; Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> See Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*; Cleophus James LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*; *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*; Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); "Fabrics of History: Essays on the Black Sermon" (Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1974); Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997).

<sup>62</sup> See Cleophus James LaRue, *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); *More Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010); J. Alfred Smith et al., *Outstanding Black Sermons*, 4 vols. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976).

<sup>63</sup> For examples of literature that engage practices and descriptive hermeneutics, see L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis: Chalice

Homileticians have not given significant attention to the distinctions between the preaching of African American women and African American men as it relates to style and content. In this regard, most homiletical literature about Black preaching relies primarily on the preaching of African American males, and/or has been written by African American males, the historically dominant figures within Black preaching traditions. My attempt is not to argue that there has been an intentional exclusion of African American women. Without question, this exclusion occurs because the theorizing of Black preaching is still in its early phases. Indeed, Black homiletics is a relatively young area of research.

Dissonance between homiletic theory as it is written and taught in classrooms is one origination of literature on Black preaching. Literature about Black preaching arose as a result of necessity and intrigue. Henry Mitchell and Cleophus J. LaRue have made important contributions to the inception and development of a Black homiletic. They have contributed two of the foremost trajectories of Black homiletics in its “coming of age” to date.<sup>64</sup> Mitchell,<sup>65</sup> in the face of a virtually non-existent literature, and LaRue,<sup>66</sup> in the face of increasing yet limited literature, offer descriptive hermeneutics of Black

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Press, 2003); Katie G. Cannon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: Continuum, 2002); LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*; Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art; Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. For examples of literature that moves towards methodological and theoretical construction, see Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994); Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*.

<sup>64</sup> See Kenyatta Gilbert’s chapter, “Black Homiletics Coming to Age: Two Leading Proposals” in Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> See Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, [1st ed.], C Eric Lincoln Series on Black Religion (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970); *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*.

<sup>66</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*.

preaching. LaRue explains the dissonance between both Black preaching and homiletic literature, and Black preaching and the homiletic classroom of predominantly white institutions of theological education.<sup>67</sup> According to LaRue, one primary issue for the Black preacher in the homiletics' classroom is that the majority of homiletic literature on preaching is based on white religious experience. This particular religious experience has shaped the discourse of homiletics and the homiletic classroom in predominantly white theological seminaries and divinity schools. The influence of white religious experience has resulted in Black students having to "piece together a workable homiletic."<sup>68</sup>

The works of Henry Mitchell first articulated an understanding of "Black preaching" in a predominantly white-male homiletical discourse. In *Black Preaching: the Recovery of a Powerful Art*,<sup>69</sup> he offers a history and understanding of the style and theology of Black preaching. Two of the works' most important contributions to the field of homiletics are an understanding of the "caught and taught" nature of Black preaching under apprenticeship models, and the importance of cultural understanding within preaching, emphasizing the need for every preacher to "affirm and work within the culture of the congregation."<sup>70</sup> Herein we see an immediate difference in what Mitchell describes as important aspects in Black preaching and how homiletics is often taught in

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<sup>67</sup> *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, xii. For a discussion on how "white" and "black" preaching can become partners of mutual exchange for the purpose of understanding and teaching preaching, see LaRue's chapter on "Black Preach and White Homiletics" in *ibid.* This is an adaptation of an earlier essay, "Two Ships Passing In The Night," in Mike Graves, *What's the Matter with Preaching Today?*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, xii.

<sup>69</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

predominantly white theological schools.<sup>71</sup> Also, Mitchell describes aspects of biblical approach (i.e. oral tradition, gospel not science, imaginative elaboration, identification with the biblical story, and storytelling) and personal style (tone, mannerisms, repetition, storytelling, role playing, slow delivery, and rhetorical flair) in Black preaching. Mitchell's main premise is not that the Black sermon has different parts than the white sermon, but to show how the Black sermon is done "differently."<sup>72</sup>

*Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*<sup>73</sup> is a seminal text that describes and places facets of the Black preaching tradition in conversation with white homiletics in North America. The presence and persona of the Black-preaching woman continues to raise additional questions to Mitchell's description of Black preaching. Three key questions these women bring to the work are: How has the exclusion of women continued the "legacy" of Black preaching? How does the presence of Black preaching women change what has been codified as the "Black preaching" tradition? How does limited access to pulpit spaces determine who is allowed into the full teacher-apprentice relationship? These questions are particularly important for two reasons. First, "stylistic" differences between men and women have been used as excuses to block Black women's full inclusion in the preaching brotherhood.<sup>74</sup> Second, Black women's

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<sup>71</sup> There have been more recent developments in the importance of engaging culture and preaching in general. See Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*, 26; "An African American Woman's Perspective: Renovating Sorrow's Kitchen."

historical struggle for ordination has been instrumental in “alternative pulpits” being central in the preaching history of Black women.<sup>75</sup>

In *The Heart of Black Preaching*, LaRue recovers and develops a “power motif” at the heart of Black preaching. LaRue argues that biblical interpretation lies at the heart of Black preaching’s powerful efficaciousness. This biblical interpretation is based on how African Americans conceptualize God based on their experiences of God in their social contexts. The main assumption in this “power motif” of biblical interpretation is that there is “a mighty God who acts on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed.”<sup>76</sup> LaRue uses the sermons of five 19<sup>th</sup> century Black male preachers to prove the existence of this motif, as well as the sermons of six 20<sup>th</sup> century preachers, including those of three women and three men, to demonstrate its continued existence in the creation and organization of sermons.

Recognizing the contributions of LaRue’s argument, one must also recognize the limitations of LaRue’s theory. LaRue imports a model established from his analysis of Black preaching men onto the preaching of Black women without distinction, even as he recognizes and calls attention to the “varieties of Black experience.”<sup>77</sup> The “power motif” does not account for multiple experiences of African Americans and preaching African Americans. Without accounting for multiple experiences, the understanding of effective

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<sup>75</sup> See *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*, 33; Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*; Marcia Riggs, *Can I Get a Witness?: Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>76</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, xxx.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

and powerful Black preaching is limited to what is excavated and demonstrated from 19<sup>th</sup> century Black men.

A more recent addition to Black homiletics is Kenyatta Gilbert's *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*.<sup>78</sup> Gilbert contends that Black homiletics has yet to expand as a discourse in a way that does not limit it to responses and comparisons with Eurocentric homiletics.<sup>79</sup> The result is a circumvention of Black preaching's relevance to contemporary contexts of ministry. While affirming the value within the pioneering works of Mitchell and LaRue, Gilbert also engages the essentialist claims about culture and Blackness present in the earlier works, challenging their relevance and implications for present-day African American preaching ministries. In response, Gilbert offers a "trivocal" descriptive of Black preaching, which expands already-existing priestly and prophetic trajectories of Black preaching.

Gilbert explains the trivocal model as prophetic (justice seeking), priestly (healing), and sagely (drawing upon a communal ongoing understanding of experience and struggle with God). He expresses that the model holds promise for contemporary relevance because it is grounded in the varying religious and secular communal concerns of African Americans. Gilbert's main objectives are to add to the critical understanding and expansion of Black preaching, while calling for constructive pedagogies targeted at

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<sup>78</sup> Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*.

<sup>79</sup> Gilbert utilizes Dale P. Andrews' *Practical Theology for Black Churches* as an example of an engagement of black preaching on its own terms, *ibid.*, 22.

the homiletics' classroom. If such moves are not made, he posits that "our homiletic theorizing will be scantily useful"<sup>80</sup> in preaching practices.

Gilbert validly calls for the expansion of literature about African American preaching to develop on its own terms for the purpose of relevance in practice within the communities to which it speaks. As Gilbert engages the "still to be done" of Black homiletics, there remains a question of how the marginalized voices of Black preaching might contribute to the dialogue. For instance, the models of "priest" and "prophet" both have an understanding of pulpit access and acceptance, two things not necessarily given in the preaching ministries of women, historically. The call to do the "still to be done" begs the question: how, where, and in what ways are we engaging the preaching of Black women in the expansion of Black homiletics? This is of unquestionable importance as it relates to remaining relevant to preaching ministries and contexts.

Mitchell, LaRue, and Gilbert make valuable contributions to the development and expansion of Black homiletics. In varying degrees these texts brush against an understanding of variety in experience amongst African Americans. However, in an acknowledgement of variety in African American experiences, they give limited attention to gendered differences within their descriptive interpretations of what Black preaching is, does, or should do. These texts must be accompanied by understandings of Black preaching from the margins.<sup>81</sup> At minimum, attention must be given to the preaching of Black women, expanding the understanding of what "Black preaching" is and does. If

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Here "margins" is not used in the same manner as LaRue uses it to explain an "oppressed group of individuals." Margins is used to describes the voices and experiences left unattended as the descriptive and understanding of Black preaching has been advanced...

not, just as LaRue argues about Black students attending predominantly white institutions of theological education, Black women are left to “piece together a workable homiletic that will fit the particulars of their own religious experiences.”<sup>82</sup>

### Women’s Homiletics

Women’s homiletic literature faces similar struggles as Black homiletic literature in relation to finding a place for women’s experiences within Eurocentric-male institutions of theological education. There are two major ways in which women’s experiences have been engaged in the field of homiletics. First, recovering a lost history of preaching women has been significant. This has helped address a limited acknowledged history of women’s peaching in North America, one that continues through subsequent generations of preaching women.<sup>83</sup> Second, homileticians have considered how women’s experiences expand our understandings of the practice and teaching of preaching.<sup>84</sup> The second trajectory is most significant to our immediate discussion.

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<sup>82</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I’ll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, xii.

<sup>83</sup> For history and women’s preaching, see Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*, Gender and American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); “Fruits of Fervor (B): Your Daughters Shall Prophesy” and “A Great Company of Women” in O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004); Kienzele, *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*; “The Preachers” in Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader’s Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Beverly Ann Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman’s Rights and Religious Conviction in The Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

<sup>84</sup> Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Elaine J. Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography*, Publications of the American Folklore Society New Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Carol Marie Norén, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); Christine M. Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1989); Hudson and Turner, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women’s Voice in Preaching*.

Women's experiences are inseparably linked to recovering preaching women in history and supporting the ongoing preaching ministries of women. In their ongoing pioneering stages, gendered studies in homiletics have generated discussions about preaching and women's ways of preaching that are either based on predominantly white feminist theories, or do not inductively arise from the ongoing practices of African American clergywomen as a particular group of preaching women.<sup>85</sup>

Homiletic literature on women and preaching is greatly influenced by feminist theologies and criticisms of language. Rebecca Chopp in *The Power to Speak*<sup>86</sup> contends that, until the hidden systems of language, symbols, and linguistic structures which promote hegemonic ideologies are exposed, we require those on the margin to continue in foreign non-sensical babbling that renders the *other* silent. The objective in women's engaging in theological speech and language is not to discard Scripture or the tradition, but to transform non-sensical babble into speech that can be appropriated and understood. Within this objective, homileticians engage the study of women and preaching.

Developing women's homiletics has been a theological task that seeks to allow our texts and traditions to live into what they are meant to be: the truth and revelation of God that is accessible to all. One primary way in which this has been done is through breaking up the conceptualization of preaching as established by a male-centered

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<sup>85</sup> However, I do not ignore that African American women are given some attention in homiletic literature that engages women's ways of preaching and feminist preaching. The major concern here is the use of black women's sermons as a primary and major resource for the construction of a homiletic theory. For homiletic literature on gender and preaching, see Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*; Norén, *The Woman in the Pulpit*; Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*; Lucy Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Nashville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

<sup>86</sup> Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God*.

Protestant pulpit.<sup>87</sup> Re-conceptualizing preaching entails engaging preaching as a task done by women who have valid experiences of the life and the Divine. In this, women's experience and preaching has expanded the models, images, and theologies of preaching; it has explored the way in which language and preaching promotes ideological traditions and/or subverts and transforms ideological traditions. It has underscored the importance and struggle of women developing into "voiced" individuals as preachers. The works of Christine Smith, Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, and Anna Carter Florence have been of real significance to the discourse.

Christine Smith makes an important contribution to women's homiletics by offering a feminist homiletical method based on the metaphor of weaving. In *Weaving the Sermon* Smith brings to the center of homiletic theory the authority of women's experiences as a weft that can transform tradition and preaching.<sup>88</sup> The woman preacher is the weaver: her experience is the loom of authority<sup>89</sup> and she weaves with a warp of critique to patriarchal and androcentric traditions of Scripture and theology.<sup>90</sup> Through these elements, feminist preaching transforms and creates a new vision. In this new vision for homiletics, Smith acknowledges her subjective limitations as a white feminist, but still espouses the need to recognize the interrelatedness of multiple forms of oppression as it relates to global feminisms.

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<sup>87</sup> Roxanne Mountford discusses the contested rhetorical spaces of the pulpit in American protestant spaces, and the conceptualization of preaching as a "manly art" as it relates to women and rhetoric; see Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*.

<sup>89</sup> Smith draws upon feminist understandings of authority as a form of mutuality and solidarity, as opposed to assumed power, *ibid.*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-5.

In a later publication, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*,<sup>91</sup> Smith continues her call that we must take seriously the interrelated natures of oppression and this interrelatedness should influence justice seeking as it manifests itself in preaching. In this regard, preaching is both a performative event and an ethical task. Preaching is an act of justice against the injustices found in heterosexism, sexism, white racism, handicappism, and classism. Smith begins charting a trajectory in women's homiletics that remains underdeveloped and yet mirrors the experience of women from various ethnic groups.

Smith places the experiences of women and justice at the center of preaching. The project of women's homiletics needs to be broadened by placing qualitative understandings of women's preaching in dialogue with prescriptive methodologies of preaching. This could both enhance prescriptive methodologies based on their relativity and closeness to the actual preaching of women. A serious engagement of the preaching of Black women is one aspect of expanding the work of women's homiletics and this trajectory that Smith has charted.

In *Saved from Silence*,<sup>92</sup> Tuner and Hudson engage the idea and metaphor of voice in preaching, particularly as it relates to women moving from silence to voice. Theology is at the center of understanding voice.<sup>93</sup> For Turner and Hudson, a theology of preaching cannot be considered without a theology of voice, which originates from God and has creative agency. Women's finding their voice in and for preaching are often

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<sup>91</sup> *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>92</sup> Hudson and Turner, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

difficult theological tasks. This difficulty is due to the fact that women have long being silenced in society and churches.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, as women learn to preach they gain both new skill sets, but they also come to value their own voice and believe they have something to say. However, they must first believe that their experiences are valuable and valid.<sup>95</sup> In this way, voice is both prophetic and redemptive because “when a person who has been oppressed stands and speaks, that person experiences redemption.”<sup>96</sup>

Turner and Hudson excavate these ideas of voice as prophetic and redemptive from Ann Julia Cooper’s theological descriptive of Blacks and Black women in the South finding voice in their being created in the “sound of God.”<sup>97</sup> For Cooper, to be silenced was oppressive, but the struggle to be voiced was a difficult redemption; its prophetic nature lay in its additions to the “chorus of voices.” The chorus of voices lies in direct opposition to a hegemonic ‘solo’ that perpetuates racist, classist, and sexist ideals.

Turner and Hudson note that women face obstacles to become voiced in the pulpit. However, even as they acknowledge the common obstacle of being silenced amongst women, there is little account for how the obstacles to become voiced individuals may vary between women. This is significant, as women face different forms of oppressions that have rendered them silent. For instance, born a Black slave woman, Anna Julia Cooper’s theological descriptive of voice and its importance in justice as well as her subsequently becoming voiced in print inherently depicts a different set of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 87-8.

<sup>95</sup> See Chapter 7, “Coming to Voice” in *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 93-4.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 92-3.

obstacles from those of her white suffragist contemporaries.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, Turner and Hudson's work is the incorporation of focus groups with women preachers from a variety of ethnic groups. The strength of this work lies in its exposure of a shared struggle to become "voiced" by women who preach. The expansion of the work lies in helping women in their specific preaching ministries confront their most immediate obstacles to being voiced, all of which is predicated on an on-the-ground understanding of variations in women's preaching.

Anna Carter Florence in *Preaching As Testimony*<sup>99</sup> recovers testimony as a part of women's preaching tradition. Florence finds this tradition in historical, biblical, and theological aspects. The recovery of this preaching tradition is from an historical perspective of marginalized Christian preaching (that of women), which challenges and calls us to re-think "our assumptions of what it means to preach and what it takes to become a preacher."<sup>100</sup> The lives and stories of Anne Marbury Hutchinson, Sara Osborn, and Jarena Lee lay this historical foundation. Preaching as testimony in history has several characteristics, including its liminality, prophetic nature, and subversive nature. Preaching as testimony possesses liminality because it often took place in the in-between and alternative spaces to the pulpit. Preaching as testimony is prophetic in nature because it emerged from a deep encounter with texts and God. Preaching as testimony is also a

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<sup>98</sup> Anna J. Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Xenia, OH: The Aldine Printing House, 1892). For a womanist interpretation and descriptive of black women's coming to voice in relation to the work of Anna Julia Cooper, see Karen Baker Fletcher's " 'Soprano Obligato': The Voices of Black Women and American Conflict in the Thought of Anna Julia Cooper" in Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*.

<sup>99</sup> Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvi.

subversive practice; testimony is subversive in how and where it functions and in its relocation of authority in the experience of the one testifying. Carter Florence finds this homiletic theory on both theories and feminist theologies of testimony.<sup>101</sup> For Carter Florence, the “countertestimony”<sup>102</sup> of marginalized preachers requires preaching to be conceptualized anew.

Carter Florence also adds two main trajectories to a woman’s homiletic. She recovers and advances a theory of preaching based on the lives and experiences of preaching women. Additionally, the theory makes room for the “testimonies and countertestimonies” of women and others who preach from the margins. Preaching as testimony begs for the recognition of difference in proclamation, for the purpose of teaching and assisting individuals in their proclamation.

Those of us privileged to write women’s experiences into existence also have the responsibility to create spaces for those who have not been granted such authority.<sup>103</sup> Unless we create such spaces, we will continue to render those silent who have already

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<sup>101</sup> Carter Florence utilizes Paul Ricoeur and Walter Brueggemann to establish a biblical understanding of testimony in Christian Tradition. She also uses Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Rebecca Chopp to establish an understanding of feminist theologies of testimony with particular attention to how testimony relates to women’s experiences and theologies of proclamation. See Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God*; Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Paul Ricoeur and Lewis Seymour Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>102</sup> Florence adopts countertestimony from Walter Brueggemann’s work; Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles*.

<sup>103</sup> The ability to speak is predicated on the authority to speak, as it has been granted through mutual consent to a group or individual. For research on the authority to speak, discourse, and feminist studies, see Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman, *Who Can Speak?: Authority and Critical Identity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God*; Mary McClintock Fulkerson addresses “difference” as being of real importance in feminist discourses in order to take women’s experiences seriously. See Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology*.

been silenced. Literature on women and homiletics has made major contributions to the discipline. The contributions have been in alternative approaches to considering the practice of preaching and the description of preaching—for both women and men. There are two primary considerations that need to be made within the research as women’s homiletics moves forward. First, we must be honest about our own positions of privilege. Second, we must speak only “for” ourselves as we speak to and with others. We can most readily do this by inviting other voices to the table as we take seriously their preaching and practices. Qualitative research in women’s ways of preaching will continue to expand discourse around the intersections of women’s experience and preaching, while guarding against monolithic characterizations that remain removed from the diversity of preaching practices. If we do not fully understand the practices of women in their preaching, we can never truly transform tradition through the practices of preaching, nor fully assist women’s preaching ministries.

#### A Piecing-Together of Black Women’s Homiletics at Present Day

Because there is an undocumented and limited knowledge of the history of Black preaching women and their sermons from slavery until the present day, Black preaching women are continually forced to function mostly as pioneers...<sup>104</sup> As of 1998, there were only two full collections of sermons by individual Black preaching women in history in a repository: the sermons of Florence Spearing Randolph and Pauli Murray.<sup>105</sup> In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there has been increased activity in projects that engage

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<sup>104</sup> For preliminary documentations of pioneering African American preaching women of the 19th and 20th centuries, see Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

Black preaching women. These projects include sermon anthologies, research on the person of the preacher, interrogation of the contexts in which Black women live and preach, and aspects of delivery and content.

Sociological approaches provide avenues into understanding the person of the preacher and the contexts of ministry for Black women. Teresa Fry Brown offers a sociological-descriptive inquiry about Black women who preach in *Weary Throats and News Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*.<sup>106</sup> Fry Brown allows Black women to speak in their voice, based on survey and audio-visual content gathered from Black women preachers, and presents data on sermon preparation, delivery and content, the person of the preacher, vestments, and the historical accounts and obstacles of Black women preaching in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>107</sup> Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes describes the disproportionate number of Black women in pastoral leadership within Black protestant churches in comparison to the number of women who are members, servants, and who maintain pertinent lay leadership roles within these churches.<sup>108</sup>

As there have been advances in understanding the person of the preacher and her contexts of ministry, individuals have also archived the sermons of Black women. This archiving of sermons has both historical and advocacy components. The late Ella Mitchell, who began preaching in 1935,<sup>109</sup> demonstrated the pertinence for the continued advocacy for women's rights to preach fifty-six years later in the 1991 publication of

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<sup>106</sup> Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid; Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women—: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*.

<sup>109</sup> Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style*.

Mitchell's *To Preach or Not to Preach*, which featured essays by Black clergy advocating for women's rights to preach in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>110</sup> Mitchell was an instrumental pioneer in collecting and publishing sermons by Black clergywomen.<sup>111</sup> She is also the known editor of the volume *Those Preaching Women*. Sermon anthologies continue to be published alongside biographical information on historical and contemporary Black clergywomen,<sup>112</sup> and the intent of these publications is direct advocacy for, exposure of, and preservation of the preaching of Black women.

Even as historical evidence, content, and documentation of sermons and paper fragments by Black women have increased, there is a limited amount of research engaging the rhetorical strategies of Black preaching women for the purposes of advancing homiletical theory for instruction. Fry-Brown begins to outline a descriptive of Womanist preaching which entails preaching justice in her article "Sorrows Kitchen."<sup>113</sup> The primary task of Womanist preaching is found in its excavation of justice in the history of Black faith and preaching while simultaneously furthering the vision of life and community as God intended. Fry-Brown explains that the Womanist preacher keeps the

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<sup>110</sup> Ella Pearson Mitchell, *Women: To Preach or Not to Preach: 21 Outstanding Black Preachers Say Yes!* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1991).

<sup>111</sup> *Those Preachin' Women* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1985).

<sup>112</sup> For sample anthologies see Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*; Riggs, *Can I Get a Witness?: Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology*.

<sup>113</sup> Fry Brown's proposal can be found in Brown, "An African American Woman's Perspective: Renovating Sorrow's Kitchen."

existential realities and injustices at the forefront of her preaching tasks and agenda.<sup>114</sup> In this way, she provides a prescription for a particular type of Black women's preaching.

Interestingly, the most direct engagement with the content of Black women's preaching as it relates to excavating themes from their sermons and/or written papers comes from outside the field of homiletics. Betty Collier-Thomas, a historian, and Chanta Haywood (from the perspective of literary analysis), provide examples of this type of engagement. Collier-Thomas engages the sermon texts of Black preaching women from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and posits that, across their variety of contexts and denominations, the women express common themes of "power, through Christ, to defeat worldly evils by overcoming either personal shortcomings or oppressive political, economic, and social struggles." Here, Collier-Thomas picks up both theological themes and themes of social engagement.<sup>115</sup>

In a different yet similar trajectory, Chanta Haywood in *Prophesying Daughters* identifies the text of Joel 2:28-29 as a recurrent theme and referent in the autobiographies of 19<sup>th</sup> century Black preaching women, including Jarena Lee, Maria Stewart, Julia Foote, and Frances Joseph Gaudet. Haywood situates the Joel text as a foundation that enabled these pioneering women to advocate for social change and reform as they wrote and preached in their ministries. However, due to Haywood's and Collier-Thomas' operating out of historical and literary perspectives, they do not make the additional moves to consider what their findings mean for the ongoing instruction of preaching.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, xvii.

There is a virtual “erasure” of Black preaching women in history, which has been facilitated by limited documentation. Projects about Black women’s preaching lift up the preaching of Black women and their sermon content for review and exposure. However, the overall project is relatively young, spanning just over thirty years, and we have yet to robustly engage Black women’s preaching for the pedagogy of preaching. The step forward in both addressing the *faux pioneering* of African American preaching women and expanding the project of homiletics is to engage their sermons for the excavation of theories grounded in their preaching. Black women’s ongoing preaching practices hold the potential to interrupt and expand conversations about Black preaching, women’s ways of preaching, and homiletic theory in general. The relevance of Black women’s preaching to the ongoing practices of preaching is a question begging to be answered.

### **Conclusion**

The outsider-within status of African American women makes their sermons worthy of close examination. Black women continue to compete with the image of the Black preacher, as *Black* and *male*, while simultaneously navigating the struggles of what it means to be a woman proclaimer. The image of the “Black preacher” is symptomatic of the historical and ongoing gendered politics of African American congregational spaces. Similarly, institutions that prepare an afforded group of African American preaching women for their ministries are based on ideals of theological education founded in Eurocentric-male models. These models of theological education still struggle to make room for the “voice and experience” of African American women.

Although texts are emerging to include gendered and cultural experiences about practices of preaching, the African American preaching woman remains an outsider-within amongst the discussions. Texts on Black preaching have increased but uphold the ghostly image and style of Black preaching as associated with the Black male. Similarly, as texts on women's ways of preaching have increased, they are dominated by the images and styles of white women and/or white feminist ideologies. This situation reflects the related nature of Black women's historically assigned place in their contexts of ministry, and the ongoing project of creating space for their experiences in the academy as both Black and woman.

## CHAPTER II

### NEW AVENUES FOR STUDYING BLACK WOMEN'S PREACHING

“The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste, and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance.”<sup>116</sup>

#### Introduction

The experience and practices of Black preaching women remain bifurcated between the categories of Black preaching and women's preaching in homiletic literature. Due to this bifurcation, homileticians have not explored the preaching of Black women on its own terms. This lack of exploration has led to a scarcity of knowledge about the preaching of these women, and continues our limited ability to glean the wisdom of African American women as mentors and tutors in preaching. As outsiders-within, Black women have preached and continue to preach. The question at the helm of this research is: what are Black women doing in their preaching? This question is of real importance because these women continue to gain an audience, even as their presence as Black and woman are not readily privileged in the pulpit.

Considering the outsider-within location of preaching Black women, it is tempting to render their preaching as either accommodating the status quo or resisting it in terms of what it means to be Black, woman, and preacher. Creative ingenuity provides an inroad for exploring the content of Black women's preaching without necessitating the purist labels of accommodation and resistance. Within the framework of creative

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<sup>116</sup>Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 272.

ingenuity, Black women's preaching involves a tactical use of their agency, which holds the potential to disrupt the ways in which preaching has been described.

A sermon is recognizable by listeners based on its basic minimalist components established over time. These minimalist components create the broad genre called sermon. Within the broad genre of sermon there are characteristics that homileticians commonly associate with particular categories of preaching, including Black and women's preaching. African American preaching women at minimum navigate the listener's assumed characteristics of Black and women's preaching as they simultaneously navigate the minimalist components of sermon as genre. Their navigation of all three of these entities in preaching adds dimensions to the categories of Black and women's preaching.

### **Engaging Black Women's Preaching as Creative Ingenuity**

The exclusion and subordination of women's bodies and voices in religious spaces has led to discourses about how we move forward in correcting such injustices. The practices of women as they relate to our own flourishing are central to these conversations, as well as to our understanding of the ways in which every individual possesses agency. In simple terms, agency can be understood as the capacity to "act." Homileticians such as Christine Smith and Teresa Fry Brown have approached women's preaching as a practice that can directly confront injustices and transform religious spaces and traditions. At the center of these approaches are assumptions about the moral dimensions of agency as either resistant or accommodating.

Though I build upon this literature, I also move along a different trajectory that does not explicitly assign women's preaching to categories of accommodation and resistance. The agency present in Black women's preaching is meaningful; beyond but not exclusive of its moral dimensions. Creative ingenuity offers a broader descriptive of Black women's preaching, which may include the simultaneous presence of both accommodation and resistance and, at minimum, an expression of their agency.

#### "Both And": Accommodation and Resistance

Feminist studies and theories have contributed to understandings of what women's preaching should do if it is to contribute to justice and human flourishing, particularly for women, but not exclusive of *all*. Christine Smith and Teresa Fry Brown are two individuals who have extended such theories to the preaching of women. As discussed in Chapter I, Christine Smith outlines a distinctively feminist homiletic, arguing that it has the potential to create a new vision and transform both tradition and preaching.<sup>117</sup> This new vision and transformation occurs through the critique of androcentric patriarchy via the authority of women's experience.

With the specific realities of Black preaching women in view, Teresa Fry Brown briefly outlines what Black women's preaching must do under Womanist tenants if preaching has a trajectory of liberation and justice.<sup>118</sup> Fry Brown describes Black women's preaching as having the potential to "renovate sorrow's kitchen" (her metaphor for the Black church) through using the "tools of renovation." The Womanist tools of renovation involve the preacher's using "a fresh reading of the text" and "relentlessly

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<sup>117</sup> Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*.

<sup>118</sup> Brown, "An African American Woman's Perspective: Renovating Sorrow's Kitchen."

engaging injustices”; she articulates her standard of justice and carves out her own space.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, Fry Brown relies on the practices of Black preaching women to extend a justice trajectory.

Fry Brown makes clear that the presence of a Black woman in the pulpit creates new visions of the image of preacher and justice; however, it is equally clear that the work of the Womanist preacher does not stop at pulpit presence. Both Smith and Fry Brown delineate distinct elements of what transformational preaching by women entails. Their commonalities are found in the preaching of women being actively resistant to the patriarchal injustices that are in direct opposition to human flourishing.

Thus far, feminist homiletics have offered “tools” for women’s preaching by way of prescriptive tactics, locating value in women’s experiences of having the ability to transform and bring about justice. The underside of this trajectory is that it incidentally creates a binary between preaching that “accommodates” the status quo and preaching that “resists” the status-quo. This binary response does not consider the options of a woman doing both of these, neither of these, or some of each in her preaching. Applying these categories to the preaching of Black women potentially forces an essentialism within the experiences of these women that does not account for complexity in their experiences and preaching.<sup>120</sup> The binary answers assume that the common presence of

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> See Marla Faye Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 5-7. Frederick explains that the dichotomy of resistance and accommodation is a false one as it relates to African American women’s spirituality and participation in black churches. The reality is more of a continuum of accommodation and resistance, and the specific places where individuals fall on this continuum cannot be essentialized. Similarly, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, in *Righteous Discontent*, explores the false binary of accommodation and resistance as it relates to the political and liberative thrust of the black church, and missing the diversity and sometime contradictory set of beliefs present within these institutions. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*.

race, class, and gender discrimination in the lives of Black women creates a monolithic response among African American preaching women. In this, we potentially miss the “more entangled” manner in which religious practices—including preaching—are lived out.

Oxymoronically, there are instances in which a woman preaches, embracing the larger tradition that discounts her own presence and experience, in a way that further contributes to injustices. However, at the same time, the embracing of tradition or utilization of tradition out of a place of comfort, familiarity, or tactical use does not necessarily discount the presence of resistant activity. For instance, the woman who uses exclusively male personification of the Divine through the masculine pronoun,<sup>121</sup> yet pulls upon female protagonists in the biblical narratives to make her sermonic idea come to life, is neither fully accommodating nor resisting the status quo. In this instance, “male” language may dominate the environment in which the woman preaches and speaks; it may be what she is accustomed to, and that with which she is most comfortable. And yet, while the male personification of the Divine continues the legacy of male preference in the space, her choice of a female protagonist and heroine interrupts the assumed “male preference.”

Similarly, the gathering of all women at a prayer breakfast with a woman preacher/“speaker” in a church that does not affirm or allow the presence of women in pastoral leadership could simultaneously be accommodating and resisting the power structures in place. The women and preacher/“speaker” who continue to gather in a space

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<sup>121</sup> In this project, I use the masculine pronoun for God because the women preachers featured here unanimously refer to God using the masculine.

that affirms the limitation of their ability to have an authoritative presence in the spiritual and religious lives of all members in the congregation, contribute to the continued perpetuation of male-preferred leadership, female subordination and submission, and a distrust of women whenever they are not being watched and monitored. However, these women have simultaneously created their own hush harbor within such a congregation where they are in charge of their own teaching, spirituality, and religiosity. In turn, this entails the transferring of women's wisdom and valuing their experiences of the Divine as authoritative sources.<sup>122</sup>

In these instances, the speech and actions of these women are neither purely accommodating nor resisting. Assumptions of accommodation and resistance have the potential to prematurely interpret, direct, and prescribe the preaching ministries of Black women before understanding the already existing working parts of their preaching. Therefore, this research departs from the work of feminist homiletics as a prescriptive task; however, it subscribes to the same intentions of enhancing the tools and practices of those who preach. I am not seeking to intentionally discover or prescribe feminist strategies for Black preaching women. On the other hand, I do hope that closely studying these women's sermons opens up avenues for understanding their preaching along a continuum of accommodation and resistance.

There must be an alternative way to render Black women's preaching and sermons as significant without refuting or proving the existence of either accommodation or resistance in their preaching. In this way, value is in the very act of Black women

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<sup>122</sup>Teresa Fry Brown discusses black women's handing down of spiritual values and wisdom one to another in Brown, *God Don't Like Ugly: African American Women Handing on Spiritual Values*.

preaching, regardless of where their preaching is located on the continuum of accommodation and resistance. Saba Mahmood asserts, "Agentive capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms." Here, the highlight and emphasis is on agency, not necessarily on action being expressed in accommodating or resisting aspects.<sup>123</sup> Engaging the sermons of Black women as expressions of creative ingenuity locates value in their productions without designating how their productions "should" function.

### Preaching as Creative Ingenuity

Preaching as creative ingenuity assumes that individuals have the ability to act and make decisions about the content and practice of preaching, even amidst sometimes predetermined assumptions about both the pulpit space and the valid performance and content of a sermon. A preacher demonstrates agentive capacity as she makes decisions and use of inhabited norms for her own preaching purposes. African American women engage in this type of creative ingenuity in their preaching and sermon composition. These larger understandings of creativity and agency can be understood within a framework of practice theory, which assumes that a degree of power is accessible to all participants in a system, even when power differentials are present.

Marla Frederick has engaged similar ideas of creativity and agency as it relates to the spirituality of African American women specifically.<sup>124</sup> Frederick explains that Black women's spirituality is an expression of their *creative agency*, as spirituality allows them

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<sup>123</sup> Saba Mahmood, "Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject," in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, *Gender, Theory, and Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 186.

<sup>124</sup> Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*.

to engage both the public and private spheres of their daily lives.<sup>125</sup> She explains that creativity in the midst of struggle is both resistance and Black women's utilization of agency.<sup>126</sup> Frederick states that, "given the obstacles that these women must overcome to participate (in the public sphere), their actions, though not always protest-oriented, are nonetheless agentic."<sup>127</sup> In other words, spirituality is the catalyst and means of these women's engagement on the public level.<sup>128</sup> This conceptualization is in direct contrast to Black women's religiosity being labeled as an opiate that continues to produce submissive and disengaged individuals who participate in their own oppression. These women creatively inhabit the norms of Black religious life, expressing agentic capacity as their spirituality influences their engagement in the public and private spheres of everyday life.

At the center of Frederick's description of *creative agency* is an understanding of power and infrastructure that assumes a degree of power is accessible to all participants in a system. Frederick has established a foundation for understanding *creative agency* in the religious lives of African American women, while the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau leave room for further complexity in understanding the relationship between power, agency, and creativity in the preaching of African American women.

Certeau explains that agents are a part of and in some form embedded into the structures imposed on them.<sup>129</sup> Structures have a built-in system and distribution of

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>129</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36-37.

power. As a part of the system, various individuals and groups have access to power in its disproportionate distribution. Individuals are tactical in their everyday practices of life while manipulating and wittily engaging the system and its structures.<sup>130</sup> Tactics are specifically the “art” of the system’s weak (Certeau’s description of those with less power).<sup>131</sup> Having access to less power, individuals utilize ingenuity in their engagement with the systems in which they exist. In this regard, they riff-off or play-on the very structures of the system in order to make, trick, or get away with things as they continue to exist within the structure’s confines.<sup>132</sup>

For Black preaching women, we can see these immediate inherited structures as those of their communities of faith that have relegated them to subordinate positions, as well as the structures of the Black sermon and Black preacher as they have been historically established as images and narratives. As they continue to exist within these religious institutions and participate within these understandings of preaching, they are inextricably a part of the system. However, as they are embedded within the structures of these systems, they also tactically engage the power postulated by the tradition and its guardians.

To some extent, preaching is both a product of a system and a tool by which these women engage a system. Preaching, as I have discussed it thus far, could be understood as a *habitus*.<sup>133</sup> Pierre Bourdieu posits that *habitus* have the characteristics of “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures... ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’...

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 38,40.

<sup>133</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 16 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

(and are) collectively orchestrated.”<sup>134</sup> The body is an important site in understanding *habitus* because it is the place of memory, preservation, and practice of the *habitus*.<sup>135</sup> As a “structured structure” there are organizing principles that have established what “Black preaching” is and, in return, what the “Black sermon” looks and sounds like in its embodied delivery. The established image of the Black preacher continues to advance the understanding and practice of preaching in the flesh. Depictions of the Black male as preacher and the safeguarding of male privilege within Black churches regulate the framework of preaching. The framework creates a largely unvaried understanding of Black preaching within its various contexts of depiction (regular).

As we have surveyed the perpetuation of the image of the Black preacher in the previous chapter, there has not been “one conductor” or “wizard” behind the image’s perpetuation. On the contrary, the image has been “collectively orchestrated” by various facets of history. Black women also engage and participate in this understanding and practice of preaching as a *habitus* when they preach. Just as *habitus* can be used to understand preaching in terms of its being a product and tool within a system, so too can the concept also be applied to the function and transferal of tradition and theology, the content of preaching.

I now turn to a description of the Black jeremiad in the preaching of a Black woman for a descriptive understanding of this in practice. Roxanne Mountford describes her experience of seeing the Black jeremiad engendered by Rev Barb, who had been

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 94.

recently elected as the pastor in an African American congregation.<sup>136</sup> The church openly struggled with her position and hiring as pastor; a small contingent of members even threatened to leave. Mountford describes this woman's respondent use of narrative, intonation, rhythm, and varied delivery as a stylistic on Black male preaching but without complete conformity to it. In this way, Rev. Barb established her presence as pastor and preacher in a new congregation. After leading the congregation in song,

The sermon was built on a series of stories designed to illustrate her point. She preached the first part in her quiet, alto voice, talking in a matter-of-fact tone, behind the pulpit.... But as she preached, she became more animated, her voice speeding up and slowing down to emphasize points.... Fifteen minutes into the sermon she abandoned the manuscript and began to walk—first out from behind the pulpit, then in front of the pulpit, then slowly down the center aisle.... She ended the sermon at the high emotional pitch right in the center of the congregation, and then asked 'The doors of the church are wide open. Who will join the church today? is there one?....'<sup>137</sup>

This preacher's sermon mirrors that of John Pearson's at its climatic end in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, as discussed in Chapter I. In an interview with Mountford, Rev. Barb expressed an understanding of the expectation and pressure for her to be "the Black preacher" while at the same time saying, "Yeah, I listen to them (Black preaching men) on the radio and they just be doing it (hoot/whoop), and *I practice it* because I think it's an art, *but I ain't doing it.*"<sup>138</sup> Here, Rev. Barb acknowledges the tradition and, to some degree, embodies it while also acknowledging her boundaries and the extent to which she will engage it.

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<sup>136</sup> Mountford explains that she prefers the term "engendered" because the tradition of the black jeremiad has been normatively male and thus made gender invisible; Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*, 171.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 103-04.

<sup>138</sup> Bold and Italic emphases added. Ibid., 108. From this point forward, words that appear in bold are my own emphasis.

Rev. Barb is keenly aware of the tradition of Black preaching, and as we see in the excerpt above, she tactically utilizes aspects of its delivery in her own preaching. However, she states that there are limitations on the degree to which she incorporates the traditional practices in her preaching, specifically in terms of the “hoot/whoop.” She is able to “speak the language” and “perform the art” in a way that is understood and accepted (*habitus*) by those listening. At the same time, she is styling on the tradition in ways that, as she understands it, make use of the power inherent to this *habitus* in very different ways (*tactics*). Rev. Barb is tactically using the *habitus* of Black preaching for her own purposes in preaching. In other words, Rev. Barb utilizes creative ingenuity in, for, and as preaching.

Through the history and practice of preaching, we understand that a “sermon” possesses particular characteristics as it takes various forms across various contexts. Sermon composition and the preaching of Black women as creative ingenuity entails these women taking the structures of what “should be” a sermon; and, while retaining its identifiable parts, creatively, artistically, strategically, or by happenstance making them their own. Yet, others are still able to “hear” these inventions as “sermon.” Mae Henderson describes Black women’s ability to communicate in spite of difference as “speaking in tongues.” She recovers the biblical idea as a way of describing the “simultaneity of discourse” in the writing of Black women when engaging spheres of racial and gendered difference.<sup>139</sup> Henderson’s description can be feasibly adapted in understanding the preaching of Black women. Black women who preach simultaneously

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<sup>139</sup>Henderson’s theory is based in part on Gadamer’s dialectical model of conversation. See Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman’s Literary Tradition,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Wisconsin Studies in American Autobiography* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

stand in a place of difference and make anew something old in a way that it can be heard across difference. This simultaneity of action—“speaking in tongues”—within the preaching of African American women makes their preaching meaningful and worthy of closer examination.

#### Excursus: Habitus & Preaching, Genre, & Sermon

Thus far I have discussed *habitus* in order to provide a sociological descriptive of preaching. This has primarily entailed considering preaching as a social and cultural practice on a large scale. Within literature about this social and cultural practice, the “recognized/normal” preacher in terms of Black preaching has been considered the Black male, while the “recognized/normal” preacher in terms of women’s preaching has been the white female. Moving forward, I am introducing preaching within the framework of *genre* based on literary and rhetorical perspectives, for the purpose of highlighting rhetorical characteristics found within the larger practice of preaching. This shift moves us from preaching as a larger social practice to sermon as a literary and rhetorical structure at the center of preaching.

At its basic understanding, genre is used to refer to a “distinct group, type, class, or category” of items “that share important characteristics that differentiate it from other groups.”<sup>140</sup> A concrete conceptualization of this description is the understanding that sermon is a different type of genre than an acceptance speech. Genre will be used as a structure for analyzing the content of Black women’s preaching alongside literature that engages the *habitus* of Black preaching and the *habitus* of women’s preaching. In other

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<sup>140</sup>Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, 4th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2009), 137.

words, placing *habitus* and *genre* alongside one another allows us to examine the “content” of the larger practice of preaching, based on what has been established as important and distinct characteristics of sermons. The purpose is to determine how the rhetorical aspects of Black women’s preaching are potentially parallel to, disruptive to, and/or divergent from what has been codified as Black preaching and women’s ways of preaching. The ways in which Black women tactically engage described elements of both Black preaching and women’s preaching while presenting elements that have not been accounted for in the literature is of particular interest for this inquiry.

### **Something Old: The Identifiable & Movable Parts of ‘Sermon’**

Particular spaces, events, and circumstances create particular expectations of speech and particular forms of speech.<sup>141</sup> There are certain expectations of what it means

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<sup>141</sup>This expectation of speech and form is grounded in an understanding of rhetorical criticism, as it relates to the rhetorical situation. Karlyn Khors Campbell in *Rhetorical Act* describes a rhetorical act as an “intentional, created, polished attempt to overcome the obstacles in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end.” See Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1996), 9. As it relates to preaching, the intentionally crafted attempt is the sermon with hopes of overcoming any obstacles to individuals hearing and experiencing the Gospel or good news (the end). The sermon, as the “intentionally crafted attempt” is the focus of this investigation. For more on rhetorical criticism and the rhetorical situation, see Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Winter, no. 1 (1968); Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*; Edwin Black, “Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method,” (1978).

I must note that there is an “on and off again” relationship between rhetoric and homiletics. Preaching is a rhetorical act, but there should be hesitation to express it as purely rhetorical without accounting for the presence of God in the preaching event. I acknowledge the limitations and inability of methods of rhetorical criticism to capture the intangible aspects of sermon composition and the preaching moment. This intangibility is namely the presence and act of the Divine. However, I choose to adopt methods of rhetorical criticism as a form of analysis because of the presence of a speaker, an intended audience, and influential speech. For more on the history of rhetoric and its relationship to homiletics see “rhetoric” in John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); “rhetoric” in Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*.

to preach a sermon and what a sermon contains.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, there are identifiable markers of a sermon as it is being delivered. These identifiable markers create listener expectations when a sermon is anticipated, as well as makes sermons recognizable as such when they are heard. There are even expectations of what a sermon sounds like, feels like, and the literary texture that it possesses. For example, an Easter Sunday sermon would be expected to engage some texts around the resurrection of Christ, the significance of the resurrection, and the presence and role of God, sin, and humanity. It would also be expected that the preacher communicate these ideas in a way that helps people hear and understand. In a tradition that possesses celebration as an aspect of sermon, there would be an expectation to end this sermon in a celebratory aspect that engages the heart mind, and often body around the resurrection of Jesus. If the preacher fails to attend to one of these categories, then she does not fulfill the expectation of delivering a sermon. This indicates that the specific gathering of individuals over time within settings of worship have both prescribed and come to expect what is acceptable as “sermon.”

### Sermon As Genre

In general, the Christian sermon contains biblical texts, a significant meaning, familiar language and/or symbols, and theological claims. John McClure describes these elements as the four codes of preaching in his book *The Four Codes of Preaching*:

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<sup>142</sup> This section is an explanation of understanding sermon as a particular type of genre. The approach relies heavily on ideas of generic criticism as a particular form of rhetorical criticism. In *Qualitative Research and Design*, John Creswell describes generic criticism as assuming that “similar situations removed from one another in time and place seem to generate similar rhetorical responses.” Similar rhetorical responses are described as “genre” based on common strategies across time and space with an organizing principle(s). See Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 141- 42; John McClure describes the genre of preaching in John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 5-8.

*Rhetorical Strategies*.<sup>143</sup> McClure delineates the four codes as scriptural, semantic, theosymbolic, and cultural. The Scripture code consists of direct or indirect reference to Scripture,<sup>144</sup> and, at its basic level, is *engaging Scripture*. The semantic code entails the meaning of the gospel in terms of what is considered truth, as expressed in language (and symbols), and the ways in which truth is expressed, developed, and communicated during the sermon.<sup>145</sup> The means of conveying truth and the places in which truth is revealed, in part and whole, arrange the sermon's material and time. At its basic level, the semantic code is *conveying truth*. The theosymbolic code is the theological narrative at work in a sermon; this includes the narrative in its most developed, least developed, and adapted forms. Often, a sermon has multiple theological paradigms, as opposed to a single overarching theological narrative.<sup>146</sup> At its basic level, the theosymbolic code is *God-talk*. Finally, the culture code is every reference to the daily life world and experience of the congregation and preacher.<sup>147</sup> At its basic level, it is the use of *familiar experience*.

Even as these common codes exist, preachers use different homiletical strategies in their arrangement, presence, and engagement in preaching. For instance, as we have discussed the historical image of the Black preacher and his preaching, we discover the presence and influence of the genres of music, song, and poetry. In this, the Black sermon is a product of histories and contexts, even as it possesses the elements of *engaging*

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<sup>143</sup>McClure utilizes the four codes to develop a rhetorical schema for preaching and analyzing preaching; *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*.

<sup>144</sup>McClure traces the roots of the scripture code to Early Christian preaching's connection to the first century Jewish synagogue in which preaching was bound closely to scripture; see *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 93-93.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 136-37.

*Scripture, conveying truth, God-talk, and familiar experience.* Furthermore, the genre of preaching itself is not a purist construction, without the influence of other genres of communication, histories, and contexts.<sup>148</sup>

### **Elements Under Investigation**

There is an expectation of the type of speech that will be delivered when Black women stand to preach. To some degree, this speech will have to conform to the expectation of what it means to deliver a sermon, including *engaging Scripture, conveying truth, doing God-talk, and using familiar experience.* Also, the event will have to conform to what it means to deliver a sermon within the context or situation in which it is being delivered. In order for the sermon to be heard, it must be recognized as a sermon in the specific context of delivery. This context could be a predominantly Black worship space, a predominantly white worship space, a multicultural worship space, etc. Furthermore, the event is influenced by the history and context of what it means to be Black and woman in the preaching event and in a larger social sphere. Many Black women proclaimers still find themselves between Eurocentric and male-centered ideologies of preaching as they continue to live and preach in Black female bodies. Therefore, it is implausible to think that the sermons of Black women would not also be influenced by their lived experience and the circumstance of negotiating a hearing in spaces in which they have been traditionally considered the “other.”

This inquiry takes the understanding of sermon as genre one step further, and seeks to tease out elements within the sermons of Black women that are parallel to,

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<sup>148</sup>See *ibid.*, 7.

disruptive to, and/or divergent from the genre of sermon as it has been described. The main focus is sermon analysis,<sup>149</sup> and I determine “substantive and stylistic”<sup>150</sup> organizing patterns between sermons based on their style and content.<sup>151</sup> In this regard, I assume that the expectation for Black women to give public address within religious spaces would generate similar rhetorical responses via sermons.

In order to articulate a type of preaching for this particular group of women, the analysis must go levels deeper than recognizing the presence of engaging Scripture, familiar experience, God-talk, and conveying truth. This does not mean that these elements are excluded or dismissed. “Deeper” simply means there must be an exploration of the interplay between the elements within the sermons. Probing the ways in which the elements of “sermon” interplay will help determine how these individuals riff off of the normative structures and expectation of sermon, creating identifiable yet different sermonic inventions from those described in homiletic literature. Understanding African American women’s creative use of ingenuity in preaching is an additional and necessary

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<sup>149</sup> For a description of Qualitative Research Designs see, Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*; My analysis relies primarily on three forms of analysis, including generic description, cluster analysis, and semiotic analysis, in order to assess sermonic style and content. These three forms of analysis are chosen due to the organic nature of how the elements under investigation emerge and work together in preaching. Preachers seldom overtly hold theological, structural, and semantic organizing principles at the forefront of their sermon-crafting process. These methods of analysis are intended to get at both overtly present and latent organizing principles and themes in the sermons by investigating the words of sermons as systematic use of signs and symbols. For an explanation of generic criticism, see above notes and *ibid.*, 141-42; Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. For an explanation of cluster analyses, see Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For examples of adaptations of semiotics as it relates to preaching see, “Semiotics” in McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics; The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*; and Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*.

<sup>150</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 143.

<sup>151</sup> Limiting the description of style and content to the use of six specific elements helps the assessment remain manageable while risking the loss of other aspects of sermon delivery. This is particularly true of the audio-visuals aspects of the preaching moment as an embodied act.

step in making room for their practices as primary interlocutors in homiletic theory that engages gender and culture.

### The Sermons

The findings that follow are based on an analysis of thirty sermons<sup>152</sup> preached by seven African American women who have preaching ministries at present day and at least five years of preaching experience. In collecting sermons, the intention was to include sermons by women who may not have advanced training or formal education in feminist, Womanist, gendered, and/or theological studies, while not explicitly excluding women who do have such training. The major reasoning for this approach is to acknowledge that there is a different type of awareness that may or may not be present in the preaching task with such advanced training. My major hypothesis is that women without advanced training in the aforementioned areas are engaging an unpolished use of creative ingenuity based on wit, wisdom, and theological conviction. This use of creative ingenuity is all the more meaningful when it is utilized in spaces that have not historically privileged the presence of Black women in the role of preacher. It is meaningful because these women are preaching and people are listening, and in turn overcoming what could be major obstacles to the reception of their message. In a similar manner, I have chosen to exclude women who have a nationally recognized platform in the form of a well-recognized television presence. National ministries targeting live and television audiences cater to a different speaker and listener relationship than those that are based on an immediate live encounter in the same space.

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<sup>152</sup> Limiting the research artifacts to thirty sermons restricts the field of inquiry while providing a large enough sample to determine common occurrences between the sermons.

The sermons fall into three major categories. The first category includes sermons by women who hold high teaching-preaching pastor positions within a congregational setting. The second category includes sermons by women who are associate pastors within a congregational setting, and who preach at least seven times per year in that congregation. The third category includes sermons by itinerant preachers who preach in various locations at least six times per year.<sup>153</sup> The consistent variable between all three categories of sermons is that the preachers each have at least five years of preaching experience.

The sermons were collected through issuing a general “call for sermons by African American clergy women” who had five or more years of preaching experience. The call was distributed to the mailing lists of my own ministry networks—Woman Preach, Inc.; Baptist Women In Ministry, Inc.; and Black United Methodist Clergy Women Association—and then forwarded in various degrees by each of these groups. Each clergywoman was asked to submit three to five sermons in the form of a typescript, manuscript, audio, or video. The respondent’s self-described denominational affiliations included United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian (PCUSA), Baptist (non-descriptive), Interfaith, and Pentecostal. The respondents included individuals from

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<sup>153</sup>The intention in establishing these categories was to help ensure that the sermons were a part of a regular and established preaching ministry that fits the criteria of pastorate, associate pastorate or minister, and/or itinerate preacher. The three different categories were selected to account for various types of preaching ministries. Each of these groups has different obstacles in negotiating a hearing within their different contexts. However, if similarities are discovered in their sermons across their different ministry situations, then there is greater likelihood and support for a genre of sermons by black women. This decision was made based on understandings of maximum variation sampling. The aims of maximum variation are to overcome one-sidedness of representation in the sample and data collection. Therefore, it is an attempt to discover similarities by overcoming differences through accounting for variety and diversity within the sample. For a description of maximum variation sampling see, Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 109.

the United States' eastern seaboard, southeast, and southwest. Sermons were selected for this research on the basis of the first responses to meet the criteria.

### **Conclusion**

Preachers utilize their agency artistically and creatively when they preach, and black women who preach face a particular set of obstacles within their preaching ministries based on a history of gendered and racial discrimination. However, whether latent or persistent, these obstacles still exist in the present day. Nevertheless, these women creatively engage the circumstances of their preaching ministries in order to deliver a message time and time again. African American women have deemed the “tools” of preaching usable in their continued preaching. The question that remains is “how *are* they using the tools?” What follows is not an essentialist claim on how Black women preach or should preach; rather, it is an in-depth inquiry into the preaching of specific Black women removed from one another in time and place.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> This research inquiry does not account for the different social-political climates in which the sermons were preached. Therefore, there could be a significant deviation between preachers that correlates with social-political climates, which is not accounted for in this research.

CHAPTER III  
ARRANGING THE PIECES: SCRIPTURE & FAMILIAR EXPERIENCE

“All the Negroes had to do generally, and those at the revival especially, was bear up under this life of toils and cares, because a blessed home awaited them in the far-off bye and bye.”<sup>155</sup>

**Introduction**

In preaching, listeners expect to hear something that relates to their ways of knowing and being as well as Scripture. Preachers fulfill this expectation through engaging Scripture and narrating life’s familiar experiences during the preaching moment.

Within a sermon, a preacher may make points of connection between the main idea or truth she hopes to communicate, and the familiar experiences from the preacher and listeners’ life world. These points of connection manifest by way of illustrations, stories, exemplification, and/or language and memory that is familiar to those gathered. There are various ways in which a preacher may engage and articulate the closeness or distance between her message and surrounding culture.<sup>156</sup> For example, a preacher engaging a passage of Scripture about lament and seeking to communicate something about lament to listeners may call forth experiences of grief, loss, and sorrow she knows to be familiar to her audience. These types of connections between culture and the preacher’s message are identified as the use of familiar experience in preaching.

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<sup>155</sup> Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 125.

<sup>156</sup> As discussed in Chapter II, familiar experience is my adaptation of John McClure’s description of the culture code in preaching. See McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*, 136-37.

Similarly, preachers refer to Scripture through direct and indirect means when preaching.<sup>157</sup> One preacher may engage in an in-depth exploration of the historical background, premises, and language of a particular passage of Scripture. Another preacher may attend carefully to the interplay between characters, words, phrases, and literary constructions of a passage. Yet another preacher may only make passing references to verses, familiar biblical stories, or phrases without any in-depth engagement, delineation, or explicit reference. The preacher's ongoing references to Scripture constitute one component of preaching and sermons that, along with God-talk, differentiates preaching from other forms of public speech and communication. Engaging Scripture simply refers to the means through which Scripture is present and utilized within sermons.

For the sake of analysis, this chapter pursues categorical descriptions of our preachers' use of familiar experience and Scripture, derived from their various approaches to each.

### **Familiar Experience: *The Women Preach***

Our preachers incorporate aspects of the listener's and their own daily life worlds into sermons by utilizing communal language and memory, creating mutual experiences, and using the voiced to give voice. When these preachers use communal language and memory in their sermons, they rely on written and oral traditions of the community that often go without saying. Although there are a variety of ways in which they use communal language and memory, the assumption that something "goes without saying"

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 15.

is what unifies their approaches. They also have a tendency to create or establish a mutual experience between themselves and listeners within a sermon, which forms a type of alignment and solidarity between preacher and listener. This creation of mutual experience establishes a common point of engagement for all listeners as well as the preacher. Lastly, our preachers use the voiced to give voice; they bring forth voices of those who are acknowledged and credible within their communities as a means to validate and/or communicate their messages. These trends within familiar experience are different in their approach, yet similar in their purposes, inasmuch as they bring the particulars of “life in this world” into the sermon.

### Communal Language and Memory

In their use of communal language and memory, our preachers depend on listeners’ abilities to recognize, understand, or identify with their content, sometimes with very little explanation. Within this trend, three aspects of communal language and memory are dominant: 1) aspects of celebration from African American preaching traditions; 2) the collective memory and experience of enslavement in the U.S., along with the subsequent realities of “living while Black”; and 3) listeners’ recognition of shared phrases, which spring up from within both oral and written traditions within the community. In this regard, their use of communal memory is very much centered on Black experiences; however, their awareness of women’s experiences and the feminine are not absent, as these experiences are a part of their very identity.

### **Celebration**

Celebration is not overtly present in all the women’s sermons, nor is it reserved only for concluding sermon material. However, when celebration is most explicitly

present, it is often at the end of the sermon, and designated with some reference to “closing” the sermon. The preacher may mark within her manuscript headings “close/celebration” and/or explicitly writes and says “I’m about to close”; “After this I’m closing”; or “One last thing before I close.” A preacher indicating “the close” of a sermon is not an uncommon practice in African American preaching traditions. “I’m about to close,” in some iteration, is a known and common refrain at the end of a sermon, which signifies the upcoming or immediate onset of celebration. As the women deploy celebration in their sermons, the content of celebration becomes worthy of exploration.

At the end of her sermon, entitled “Are you Ready to Come to the Table,” Barbara presents strong eschatological themes that include a named feminine presence. Her sermon is about the importance of appropriately preparing oneself for the communion table at present day. She creates the celebration with ideas of looking forward to a “great table,” around which she and her listeners will gather in the future. In the excerpt that follows, Barbara solidifies her theme of preparation in a future hope and joy found in the presence of God and fellow saints:

God just told me to tell you, **If you are ready for this table, you’ll be ready for that other great table!** For John recorded, “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”

See, this communion feast is just like the rehearsal dinner before the wedding ceremony.

I’m getting ready for that great table.

I’m getting ready to feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

**This is the table where I can rub elbows with Mary and Martha!**

The table where **all of God’s children have a place setting!**

And if that isn’t all...**I can look down to the head of the table and wave to Jesus!**

I want to be ready! I want to be ready to walk in that New Jerusalem!

I want to be ready to see my Savior face to face!!

**I’VE GOT TO GET READY TO COME TO THE TABLE!!!! –Barbara**

Here, “getting ready” for the table and the point of celebration has dual implications: one for the present day and one for the future. The most celebratory aspect of the preacher’s and listener’s preparation is the assurance of being “ready” for the great feast, where they will sup with Jesus and familiar saints. The communion table Barbara is asking her listeners to prepare for is a “rehearsal dinner” for the “wedding supper of the Lamb,” which will take place at the “great table!” At the great table, Barbara will be able “to look down the head of the table and wave to Jesus!” She will feast not only with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also “rub elbows with Mary and Martha.”

Martha and Mary are the feminine presence, arguably unexpected at the “table where all of God’s Children have a place setting!” The image of “rubbing elbows” almost conveys a very intimate and knowingly shared “we made it too” between Barbara, Martha, and Mary. Jesus is at the head of the table while all God’s children are around him, solidifying her imagery of mutual belonging before God. Barbara’s celebration imagery is parallel to women’s ways of knowing, historically, as it relates to place setting and arrangements at the table during a meal. Whether or not Barbara’s use of Mary and Martha or place setting is intentional, the imagery conveys that “all God’s children” include men and women, and is not limited to the normative recitation of the patriarchal lineage of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Mary, Martha, and Barbara have a special setting at the meal.

In the same trajectory of the feminine in celebration, Valerie, in her sermon “He Wants it All” combines the feminine with the use of song excerpts. Up until this point Valerie has challenged listeners to give their all to God, just as the woman in Mark 14 broke an alabaster jar of expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus’ head. Valerie’s entire

celebration is the lyrics and refrain of CeCe Winans' song entitled "Alabaster Jar."<sup>158</sup> The song is a compilation of scriptural accounts of a woman pouring expensive oil on Jesus' feet, weeping, letting down her hair and wiping the feet of Jesus dry.

And I've come to pour  
My praise on Him  
**Like oil from Mary's alabaster box**  
Don't be angry if I **wash his feet with my tears**  
And I **dry them with my hair**  
You weren't there the night He found me  
You did not feel what I felt  
When he wrapped his love all around me and  
You don't know the cost of the oil  
**In my alabaster box**  
I can't forget the way life used to be  
**I was a prisoner to the sin that had me bound**  
And I spent my days  
Poured my life without measure  
Into a little treasure box  
I'd thought I'd found  
Until the day when **Jesus came to me**  
**And healed my soul**  
With the wonder of His touch  
So now I'm giving back to Him  
All the praise He's worthy of  
I've been forgiven  
And that's why  
I love Him so much  
**Refrain**  
And I've come to pour  
My praise on Him  
-Valerie

Valerie uses the woman who was "a prisoner to the sin that had her bound," as a climatic tool to demonstrate the one who gives God all.

The feminine is the exemplar in this instance, and it is what Valerie is calling her listeners to identify themselves with as they are being challenged to "give it all." The

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<sup>158</sup> Winans, "Alabaster Jar."

protagonist is feminine, even in Valerie's exclusive use of male imagery and language for God. In this most climatic aspect of the sermon, the female body, her gestures, and her emotions become the point around which the preacher and her listeners celebrate the moment of worship, and the place in which the message is solidified. The woman's body and her actions become the entities that directly intersect even the preacher's male imagery and language for God, and quite possibly interrupt imagery that is male-preferential.

### **The Collective's Experience of Living While Black**

As discussed in Chapter I, the history of being literally caged through chattel slavery in the U.S. has influenced the experience of African Americans as a group, African American women in particular, and the imagined conceptualization of Black preaching. And yet, however distant or present in the minds of African Americans today, slavery and its subsequent creation of the second-class citizen status for Blacks in America forms a knowing amongst African Americans of the historical struggle of what it means to live while Black. The collective experience, in its amalgamation and diversity, is the point to which these preachers return in their sermons with both explicit and implied references. The women attend to collective experience not as an experience of undistinguished individuals, but as an experience that holds the "experiences" of women, children, and men—all of whom were affected in different ways by a historical narrative with contemporary implications.

In her sermon "The Tenacity of Humanity," which is based on the story of the Canaanite woman and her exchanges with Jesus in Matthew 15:21-18, Sharon parallels the "Canaanite problem," which Jesus finds himself "struggling with" to the "Black

problem.” Sharon recounts that the Canaanites had their homeland invaded, many of their people murdered, and were forced into hard labor. The preacher retraces “the tenacity of this race of people that survived after 1500 years of forced harsh slavery,” and “flourished.” She then simultaneously traces the history of African Americans’ enslavement, their subsequent lives in the U.S., and her uncertainty about whether or not “our race is heading for success or failure.” The preacher addresses the social, political, and economic ills inflicted on her race while “in the clutches of a destructive force.” She does this by tracing events by the decade that have left indelible marks on African Americans.

Sharon speaks of fragmented families caused by a targeted draft for the Vietnam War in the 1960s and manipulative welfare distributions made by the government that gave increased incentives for men not living in the home during the 1970s. The preacher also laments the “unleashing” of crack, targeting women in the “projects leaving children without the watchful presence of mothers” during the 1980s. She acknowledges the suffering of Black “young males” due to the rise of Black on Black crime during the ‘90s, and media simultaneous portrayals of their “over indulgence of drugs and alcohol” while promoting the false belief that it is more advantageous for Black males to be in jail for increased life expectancy. She ultimately charges the community to not “give up” in being tenacious, and to cry out based on their “faith,” “freedom,” and “victory in Christ, just as the Canaanite woman.”

Sharon relies on and recounts the collective memory and experience of the “Black problem” to her listeners without losing the particular ways in which racism has affected different groups of Black people, including children, women, and men. Sharon also

attends to those who could be easily lost in the story: the women and the children. The Black problem is not just the Black male problem; it is the problems of Black children, Black women, and Black men.

In a similar manner as Sharon's, but in a more succinct way, Vicki recalls the collective memory of slavery in the U.S.:

We live in a city whose claim to fame includes the **purposeful breeding of human beings for economic empowerment**—a city that is known still as the **Capitol of the Confederacy**, and depending upon where you live and whether or not your ear is to the ground, you can still hear **whispers of “the South will rise again.” Excessive thorns in our collective memories in bondage** with over 10,000 people each month being sold down the river to ports south to further feed **the insatiable appetites of enslavers** in the wealthy South. —Vicki

Vicki references the collective memory of slavery and the immediate memory of the slave trade in Richmond, Virginia, where she is preaching. The recollection of the “insatiable appetites of enslavers,” “the whispers of ‘the South will rise again,’” and “the purposeful breeding of human beings for economic empowerment” are all “excessive thorns” that her listeners are aware of as she calls them to remember.

In her sermon entitled “Where’s My Daddy” (which was delivered on Father’s Day), Valerie has explicit intentions of addressing the issue of African American fathers’ being absent from the homes of their children. She takes immediate issue with the African American rate of incarceration, facilitated by unjust policies:

**How can we say we are free when our nation incarcerates African Americans at a rate more than six times our representation in the general population?** Social policies and practices before, during, and after imprisonment can be described as nothing less than torturous and inhumane. We lead South Africa, China, and Russia in the incarceration of our citizens. African American Christians are the most recent benefactors of God’s captive freeing agenda on U.S. soil. **Our collective testimony** demands that we address the bondage of individuals in our community. **We must proclaim** within our community, and beyond its borders, to all of those who understand the Divine kinship of humankind, **that the oppressed must go free—now.** —Valerie

Valerie is challenging her listeners to “proclaim...that the oppressed must go free—now.” Her challenge is based on what she calls the “collective testimony” of African Americans’ knowledge of bondage on U.S. soil. She calls on her listeners to recall a history of bondage and the testimony of God acting on their behalf as a means to continue the pursuit of freedom.

In contrast to Sharon, Vicki, and Valerie’s explicit utilization of collective memory and experience, Louise makes use of the more implicit collective memory. She accounts for the “Black problem” in her sermon “Postponement and Reconciliation,” through the experience of an African American woman and friend. The preacher explains the experience of a woman not wanting to reveal her ethnic identity with a product she was selling, for fear of losing sales. Louise describes the experience here:

... I spoke with my high school classmate about a month ago and [she] informed me that after her bout with cancer several years ago that she has gone into hiding. She makes beautiful miniature doll clothes and though she uses her name, she had never allowed her picture to be shown in any of the publications. **She said that she feared that those who purchased from her on eBay would stop purchasing if they found out that she was an African American woman.**

She said that **she attended the trade shows and would look at her clothes displaced [displayed] on the tables of vendors and would never identify herself.** But this year, she decided that she was **coming out**... –Louise

In not wanting to lose sales, the friend never shows her face at sales events or in publications with her product, but remains as an anonymous individual or name monitoring the sales from afar. The preacher explains that the woman attended trade shows and would look at her clothes displayed on the tables of vendors, but would never identify herself. However, this particular year the woman decides that she is “coming out.” The entrepreneur is going to risk coming out to buyers as Black and woman. At the

center of Louise's use of the woman's story is a narration of the gendered and African American struggle for mutual social recognition, and the elusive yet present threat on livelihood and survival in this struggle.

In order to establish the woman's fear as legitimate, Louise does not explain or elaborate on why the woman could not share her real identity. In the preacher's lack of explanation, she makes an assumption and relies on her listeners' abilities to understand and identify with the woman's experience based on the collective memory and experience of discrimination and racism. It would not be a leap for listeners to recall the historical continuum of their own experiences of passing for white, code switching in their engagements of different social situations, and hiding (or the inability to hide) behind a name and voice before a face-to-face interview for employment.

### **Shared Phrases**

Similar to collective memory and experience and its sometimes tenant of "it goes without saying," are these preachers' use of what I am calling *shared phrases*. Shared phrases rarely need explanation, and the preacher rarely explains them even though they are normally used to explain a larger principal or idea. The phrases often belong to the community, and the preacher rarely names an author explicitly. The content of shared phrases frequently appears as the lyrics and refrains of spirituals and hymns, as well as abbreviated references to Scripture. The preachers' use of shared phrases relies on the preachers and listeners' understanding of the community's broad and immediate written and oral traditions.

Our preachers often use music as the foundation of these shared phrases. A preacher attempting to explain prayer and incite the congregation to pray gives an

example of a prayer, “guide my feet and hold my hands *while I run this race*,” followed by an explicit reference to a hymn: “The hymn writer would have said it this way, let us have a little talk with Jesus, let us tell him all about our troubles.” The references are to the hymns “Guide My Feet” and “Have a Little Talk with Jesus”; however, the preacher never explains the phrases or lyrics, and only uses them as a demonstration and point of connection for her larger principle. In a similar manner, another preacher uses a song that she credits as written by gospel singer Andre Crouch in order to explain the joy found at the intersection of the judgment and love of God in chastisement: “I don’t know why Jesus loves me, I don’t know why He cares! I don’t know why He sacrificed His life. Oh, but I’m glad, so glad He did!” Patricia uses “A Closer Walk with Thee” to narrate Moses’s walking towards the burning bush in Exodus Chapter 3:

Moses continue[d] to walk toward the burning bush  
It brings **me to the hymn... Just a closer walk with thee**  
I am weak, but Thou art strong;  
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;  
I’ll be satisfied as long  
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee. –Patricia

Our preachers connect to tradition and narrate their faith claims, the truth they intend to communicate, through song.

Outside of the explicitly traditional religious genre of music, these preachers also employ song fragments from other genres. Marvin Gaye, accredited and unaccredited, is most often referred to by his first name. They use his songs “What’s going on?” and “Inner City Blues (Makes Me Want to Holler),” and there is an assumed commonplaceness and familiarity of the artist. When Gaye is used as a direct and indirect reference, a preacher is often lamenting the social situations around them, including poverty, death, and war. I will discuss the use of Gaye and others below as an example of

one way these preaching women use the voiced in order to give voice. In the mixing of musical genres, they use hymnody that is both a part of their religious traditions and greater spheres of life, but nonetheless meter life concerns.

The women's use of shared phrases associated with Scripture is closely related to song and their God-talk, resulting in a type of a mixed media that is recognized by the community gathered. For instance, a preacher's use of the phrase "sin-sick-soul" in some iteration is a passing reference to Jeremiah 8:22, where the prophet speaks of a lack of joy and a sick heart due to the plight of his people. He asks: "is there no balm in Gilead?" However, the phrase is a communal staple from the hymn "There is a Balm in Gilead," in which the songwriter answers:

There is a **balm in Gilead**  
To make the wounded whole;  
There is power enough in heaven,  
To cure a **sin-sick-soul**. —Barbara

Although the phrase "sin-sick-soul" has a Scriptural referent, the preacher's use of the phrase aligns with the affirmation found in the hymn; the preacher is making a declaration that there is a balm in Gilead—namely God—who brings salvation.

Similar to "sin-sick-soul," our preachers use the phrase "God's track record," to imply the history of and confidence in God's faithfulness to listeners and God's intervening power. For instance, in a sermon about King Jehoshaphat, and while instructing listeners in what they should do when they find themselves "against all odds," Barbara, referring to Jehoshaphat says: "He recollects God's track record with him and realizes this is a God that cannot fail." In a similar manner, Louise says: "He [God] has a proven track record," when encouraging listeners not to "faint on the journey." Neither preacher explains in depth what the "track record" is or means, but uses it as a passing

phrase to explain either the content of Scripture, or the rationale behind their call to listeners. “Track record” has a connotation that goes without saying; it is intended to evoke a memory of God’s actions in the past.

Their use of short phrases is a way of utilizing established communal language and understandings to engage listeners, and further solidify the larger claims they are making. Through their use of short phrases, they are communicating a shared knowledge and understanding. The most tactical aspect of short phrases is the preachers’ communication of their “knowing the language” of the people and pulpit, which possibly (and sometimes indirectly) establishes their credibility in belonging.

#### Creating Mutual Experience

As our preachers rely on established communal language and memory to relate to their listeners, they also create a mutual experience amongst listeners. They often “define” a circumstance or experience by painting a portrait that their listeners can understand, or to which they can say “yes, I know this experience.” They “narrate” common experiences in detail by way of example, and they are not afraid to “mimic” or become the voices in the listener’s own head. Through the creation of mutual experience, the preachers establish a mutual point of engagement, and align themselves with their listeners, sometimes based on their knowledge of life, their listeners, and/or a more general subject matter.

Through definition, these preachers establish the boundaries of their subject matter within the daily life circumstances of their listeners. They almost always use some formula of “this word means,” “that is to,” or, most blatantly, “the definition is.” For instance, Teresa, in her sermon that engages the concept of moving from pain to power,

takes the time to paint the picture of what she means by pain while describing pain denotatively within the image of “birth pang and travail.” The preacher describes pain as “both a noun and a verb...the noun means to labor, birth pang, or even travail.” For the first third of her sermon, Teresa gets listeners on board with her understanding of pain through a detailed experience that defines what she is talking about. This conceptualization of pain and those gathered having the ability to agree and find commonality in it is what Teresa uses as a point of engagement for the remainder of her sermon. She creates the mutual experience—in the preaching event itself—around women’s experiences of giving birth.

In a similar manner, Sharon narrates an experience of how fear reproduces from one person to another by first defining fear for her listeners while she explains why we cannot allow fear to hinder us in fulfilling the commission of God:

For those of us who want to do great things but live in fear, you may need a confidence booster. But first let’s talk about fear. **Fear is a basic survival mechanism.... Additionally, fear is** related to the specific behaviors of escape and avoidance....Worth noting is that fear almost always relates to future events.... **Fear could also be** an instant reaction .... **Fear has the capability,** the power to reproduce from one person to another. –Sharon

Sharon follows her defined understanding of fear as something that can erode confidence and “reproduce from one person to another” by telling a story of two children without parents who were fearful of their living situation. She describes the resulting fear that ensued in the adults around them, including herself. Her personal knowledge of fear in life becomes the point of engagement. Sharon describes that “Fear grabbed our hearts and we did nothing....We didn’t act as the upper room inhabitants and have a prayer meeting.” The preacher parallels fear and inaction to the boldness and confidence of

those in the early church at Pentecost. Her narration of an event re-creates an experience she had, while it creates a mutual point of engagement between her and her listeners.

One of the most intrusive moves of these preachers is to become the literal voice and dialogue in the minds of their listeners, and relaying this internal dialogue back to those gathered. This internal dialogue can be a preemptive move to address possible opposition to something the preacher is saying in her message. For example, “I hear you saying, oh but that’s just not me.” The reflection of internal dialogue can also be a means of expressing emotions the listeners are experiencing in the pews that extend from ongoing life matters. With emphasis, Patricia states: “You are sitting there wondering how, where, and when is God going to bring you out! You must Hold on!” The preacher lets her listeners know that she hears and understands them in these instances of internal dialogue, even as she may be challenging and/or encouraging them.

For instance, Teresa poses a challenge to her listeners, one that is grounded in the listeners’ internal dialogue:

God said to tell you that some of you have offered your sacrifices from the wrong places....**you have even said to yourself**, I know I’m wrong but I do love you Lord and I do want to serve you... God said...I know your love for me...but your temple wasn’t completely built. –Teresa

Through internal dialogue, Teresa articulates or re-creates the circumstance in which individuals know they have done wrong before God, but are no less committed in love and service to God. The preacher aligns herself with the listeners’ feelings about their own actions and love for God by saying to them that she is certain they have already said to themselves in this specific scenario. The statement has undertones of empathy, even as she marks that the knowledge she has of their thoughts is revelation from God. The move

on the preacher's behalf may appear intrusive or presumptuous, but its intended end is to align the preacher with the listeners as she delivers her message.

For our preachers, if a communal memory or language is neither present nor in combination with their use of communal memory and language, they create a mutual experience to further align themselves with listeners. In this regard, they either use the language of their communities, showing their insider knowledge, or use their insider knowledge of the human psyche, life of faith, and life experience to create communal language. Creating a mutual experience is in support of furthering their ultimate truth claims.

### Voiced to Give Voice

In the previous chapters, I discussed the potential struggles of African American women to gain voice in homiletics literature, and within male-dominated preaching traditions. One way the women gain voice in their sermons is by using the voices of others who are recognized as credible individuals within the community in order to communicate the content and meaning of their messages. In this regard, these preachers use those who are voiced to give voice to their own message and concerns. They use various individuals, but the ones who are most notable are figures of wisdom within the communal and familial settings, and the prophets and poets of larger societal contexts. Who the women use is of real importance.

### **Cultural Prophets and Poets**

Our preachers rely on cultural icons as a familiar point of reference and a point of credibility in their sermons. Martin Luther King, Jr. is a recurring figure; so too are fragments from his speeches and *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*:

**So often we need to be led to the mountain—a place where God can have your attention...Even when MLK was in Memphis—He said that he didn't know what was going to happen to him but he knew tough times were ahead, But it didn't matter, because he have been to the mountaintop. –Patricia**

**I share in this title “Why We Can't Wait” from Martin Luther King Jr. while in a Birmingham prison wrote a letter... MLK responded that they could no longer wait. ... God told the disciples to wait but after that it was time for them to fulfill the commission to go into the world and be agents of change.  
–Sharon**

**...In the New Testament, Jesus explicitly connected discipleship with social concern and cited compassion of the needy as one measure by which he would recognize his followers. It was the prophet Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said, “Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.”... Yet, we sit here in all our piety and yet people in Nashville went to bed hungry last night, others slept with only the stars in the sky as their covering... –Valerie**

Patricia, Sharon, and Valerie use Martin Luther King, Jr. to narrate the significance of working for social change as a part of discipleship. They emphasize that social change and action cannot wait because people are in need in the surrounding communities; the challenges are difficult, but they are a part of their Christian responsibility.

As mentioned above, Marvin Gaye is another cultural icon who is utilized, regarded almost as a social prophet who spoke of the ills of his day, and who asked the same questions the women are asking of their listeners in the present. Like him, these preachers engage faith, crime, natural disaster, and social and political woes through the songs of Gaye and others:

**The Christian journey is riddled with busted situations that make us want to holler and throw up both of our hands!**

Then again on Tuesday evening, CNN reported an earthquake in Sumatra, India that registered 7.9! **Like Marvin I asked, “what's going on?” –Barbara**

For Barbara, Gaye is her “go to” artist and prophet; his songs help her articulate a message in relevant and recognizable terms. On the other hand, Sharon uses an inverse

approach in relation to Barbara, as she engages the voice of pop artist, Rihanna. In her sermon “Has the Gates of Hell Prevailed?” Sharon argues that “sin has lost its relevance without the presence of goodness,” in this regard she tells her listeners that they have been “desensitized to sin and begin to trivialize and joke about it”:

Does this sound like life in America ... We get caught up in catchy tones about murder and find ourselves singing Oh Mama, Mama I shot a man down.

Rihanna’s song....

–Sharon

Rihanna’s song “Man Down” recounts a murder occurring from the panic and perspective of the shooter. Sharon uses the song as a mechanism to illustrate how a very serious situation associated with sin has become a “catchy tune” that we “find ourselves singing” while failing to attend to the gravity of the song’s content. The preacher uses the voice of Rihanna and her listeners’ response to the song as means to underscore her claim that sin has an assumed and non-jarring presence in day-to-day life. When the preachers use cultural prophets and poets such as King, Gaye, and Rihanna, they close the gap between the sacred and secular. For these preachers, there is something to be claimed as sacred within the ordinary speech, songs, and writings that are a part of their communities.

### **The Elder-Saints**

In a similar fashion to their use of cultural icons, the women use the recognized wisdom bearers within the community to give voice to their message and concerns. For instance, “Like the old folk used to say, if it ain’t one thing it’s another.” Another variation of “the old folk” is “the saints,” as in Patricia’s use here:

You may think that God has forgotten about you...**But I am here to tell you** that God did not forget you ....**Wait on the Lord.**

**The saints used to tarry.** Tarry means to wait. **The saints used to wait** on the Holy Ghost to come in or wait for something from the Lord....They began to call

on the name of Jesus [express it]....There is power in the Name of Jesus.... Great things began to happen, but **they had to wait** on the Lord. –Patricia

The use of “the saints” and “the old folk” pulls on the imputed knowledge of the elders about the trials and difficulties of life and life in faith. As these preachers communicate a validation of the experiences of life being difficult due to repeated trials, they use the elders as credible witnesses to their words as they exhort.

“Grandmamma” is also a constant in the use of the elders. Their phrases often include “as grandma used to say,” or “my grandmother said,” in some form or another:

I remember **my grandmother** would fast on first Sundays. **She said the first thing she wanted in her body was the body of Christ; no cereal, oatmeal or pancakes, grits, sausage... just Jesus...when we change the way we approach the Lord’s Supper, I guarantee, you’ll see things start to change. Don’t believe me...** –Barbara

Here Barbara uses her grandmother’s practice of preparation for the communion table and self-voiced justification for the practice as a means to undergird her own exhortation of listeners to prepare appropriately for the communion table. Grandmother’s practice and voice becomes the support for the preacher’s claim. Similarly, as a variation on “grandmamma,” as the voice and wisdom of an authoritative elder, the women use “mama” or “mother,” as in “my mother used to say...” Vicki demonstrates the use of mama in her sermon entitled “Oil for Pouring”:

**My mother used to say**, where you show out is where you get wo’ out” **and right here all the negative, back biters get helped by Jesus**. He says, “Leave her alone. She has done what she could...” –Vicki

Vicki’s mother’s voice was the voice that gave warning that we are corrected, disciplined, and chastised in the same places and instances in which we do inappropriate things: “Where you show out is where you get wo’ out.” The preacher then uses her mother’s voice to amplify and support her claim that Jesus is correcting (“helping”) the

“negative back bitters” who have acted inappropriately. In this instance, mother’s voice and wisdom are the support for the preacher’s claim. Grandmamma and mama are established and respected wisdom bearers whose voice matters not only to the women, but also in their community. They are a part of the great cloud of witness that includes the elder saints within the preachers’ communities.

### **Women As Wisdom Bearers**

“Grandma” and “mama” are regarded as cultural prophets and poets just as much as Marvin Gaye and Martin Luther King, Jr. However, grandmothers and mothers are a part of a larger strand of the feminine as voiced wisdom and expert testimony in these women’s sermons. The preachers often use the popularity of African American women in mainstream media, academia, and the creative arts in order to validate and support their messages.

For example, Mary J. Blige, an established recording artist, becomes the example and testimony for knowing the power of prayer and surrendering to God in a sermon by Louise:

I found a story about **Mary J. Blige**. . . . **She made a lot of mistakes, but she did not faint on the journey, rather, she turned her face toward God**, went back to her center so that God could take control of her life. **She said** she had given away her power, her response, **“I dropped to my knees and started reading my Bible. It became my inspiration, my words of wisdom, and my teacher.** As I relearned how to incorporate God into my life, I realized I had forgotten how to even talk to Him. But once I started talking to Him, I couldn’t stop. I forgave myself for not caring about Mary.” **I believe that the Canton Spirituals and Mary J. Blige experienced peace with God and themselves** as they gained access by faith through grace. **They can testify to what it means to not faint on the journey.** –Louise

Blige becomes the example of “struggling and straining” for faith and experiencing God’s grace and peace through prayer and faithful Scripture reading. Louise parallels the

voice of Mary J. Blige with the title of a song performed by the Canton Spirituals' (an all-male gospel quartette group) titled "Struggling and Straining," as she admonishes and encourages listeners not to faint on the journey.

As these preachers use women in mainstream pop-culture, they also use those who are credited with scholastic authority. Vicki is the most astute in her variety and use of the "expert" African American women. She uses Emile Townes, Valerie Bridgeman Davis, and Renita Weems, all credential educators of religion and theology, to address the plight and struggle of young Black girls and children who have suffered violence and sexual abuse:

Tamar lived in patriarchal times and within a situation of life far different from our lives today. **Our response to sexual violence within our family does not have to be the same as hers. Dr. Valerie Bridgeman Davis suggests** that while "it is unfortunate that Tamar's community forced her to carry the guilt and shame and forced her to live her life as a desolate woman living in her brother Absalom's house," that does not have to be our present reality. –Vicki

Here, Vicki uses Bridgeman Davis, a Hebrew Bible Scholar, not only as a voice, but as a voice that challenges the community to offer a different response in real life than the one narrated in Scripture. The preacher uses the expert as a voice that gives her the authority to essentially "preach against the text." Another variation of Vicki's use of the "expert" African American woman is her engagement with literary artists such as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison in order to challenge listeners and solidify her message:

**Dr. Maya Angelou said,** "One is not necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest." –Vicki

For the preacher, Maya Angelou's description of courage becomes the means through which she challenges individuals to practice courage as a virtue of their faith. In another

instance, Vicki, literally uses the prayer and blessing of Baby Suggs, Holy from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to preach for her and "close" the sermon:

Finally, **we must embrace the holiness and sacredness of loving ourselves by connecting to spiritual truths like those found in Baby Sugg's prayer and blessing for the people in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.** She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it.... –Vicki

Through the voice of Baby Suggs, Holy, Toni Morrison challenges gathered listeners to imagine and create grace in the flesh during their lives in this world. In her sermon, Vicki has challenged listeners to take seriously the injustices committed against the flesh of innocent bodies, and to correct those injustices. Thus, Morrison and Baby Suggs, Holy become the individuals through whom Vicki gives rise to her voice, and they ultimately conclude the sermon.

The spoken and written words of others are the means through which these preaching women establish credibility in their messages, and give rise to their own voices. They utilize women and men who are acknowledged and respected within their communities in order to speak to their communities of faith. Yes, the use of others to vouch for one's authority is not a novel phenomenon in preaching; however, *who* the women choose to use is of real importance. In many of these women's sermons, Sophia, the personification of wisdom, is the African American woman whose voice is perpetually repeated through the voices of other African American women. Our preachers are the feminine voices in the preaching moment and pulpit, but they simultaneously invite and make room for the feminine voice that comes from within the larger community. As the preachers themselves embody a privileged space, they invite other women into that space to bear witness and to make proclamation with them.

### **Familiar Experience: Talking Back to “Structuring Structures”**

As the preachers attend to the expectation and place of familiar experience in sermons, their own and their listeners’ life world is an integral part of sermon content. The women rely heavily on the community’s language and memory, whether by recalling the collective experiences and language of the community, or creating common points of experience around which the community can engage. As another means of using that which is familiar, the women conjure the recognized voices of others within their sermons as a means of giving voice to their own faith claims. What becomes worthy of noting is when the preachers engage the traditions and language of the community alongside of the feminine. This parallel shows forth in their use of celebration, treatment of the collective’s experience of living while Black, and the voices they choose to assist in proclaiming their messages.

Claiming a vibrant subjectivity lies at the center of the preachers’ use of familiar experience. The persona of being Black and woman is most clairvoyant in these women’s simultaneous attention to cultural products attached to their ethnic identity and communities as well as their sometimes very apparent engagement with feminine experiences. Contributors to Black and women’s preaching literature highlight the importance of subjectivity in preaching, albeit in different ways. Black preaching literature generates great traction around celebration and stock formulas as cultural products of African American faith communities. Literature about women’s preaching gives attention to the subversive potential of women’s experience in the content and practice of preaching. The greatest affinity between these preachers’ sermons and current homiletical literature about preaching and experience is contained in the preachers’

blending the described practices, creating an amalgamation of the practices, and at times creating altogether different entities. Through their sermons, however, the women interrupt the binaries of Black and women's preaching as their religious and life experiences as Black and woman richly texture their sermons.

### Interrupting Speech

The women tend to improvise on what has been recognized as the Black preaching tradition. This is most evident in their use of celebration and shared phrases. As they engage the tradition, they simultaneously make room for the possibility of subverting a tradition of male preference and form, primarily by means of creating space for their *own* particular experiences, broader cultural feminine experiences, and the experiences of those on the margins of their communities. These women preachers use tools of a tradition while tactically appropriating those tools for their own purposes, both within and outside the confines of celebration and stock formulas.

### **The Vehicle of Tradition**

As we have noticed, our preachers utilize commonplace aspects of Black preaching such as celebration and stock formulas (similar to shared phrases above). These commonplace elements become the means of helping individuals further identify with the message, and they help to clarify the message's significance, truth, and relevance. Mitchell states that, in preaching, the "familiar is used as a model for understanding the unfamiliar."<sup>159</sup> Celebration and stock formulas are the meeting of multiple subjectivities: those of the community, the preacher, and the tradition.

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<sup>159</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 103.

Celebration occupies a great deal of space within conversations about African American preaching traditions. Celebration takes up such a great amount of space in the current literature that it is often mistakenly understood as the “gist” of African American preaching. As it may not be the totality of the preaching tradition, it is still a hallmark of the tradition. Henry Mitchell describes celebration as a mobilizing necessity and an art form, as well as one of the few aspects that could be labeled as “Black” in terms of preaching.<sup>160</sup> Celebration occurs near the end of the sermon, and encompasses the meeting of the mind, heart, and body in a sermon’s message. The material of celebration often includes reference to Scripture, including the crucifixion, familiar hymns, and the experiences of the preacher’s and people’s moments of conversion and experiences of God.<sup>161</sup> In *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God*, Frank Thomas extends Henry Mitchell’s initial description of celebration and its role in Black preaching.<sup>162</sup> As opposed to relegating it to the status of ad hoc content, Thomas describes it as the “joyful and ecstatic reinforcement of truth already taught and delivered in the main body of the sermon.”<sup>163</sup>

This content of celebration may also include the use of stock formulas, which are recurring combinations of words and phrases within sermons between different preachers. Some of these are traditionally understood as “set pieces” in African American preaching traditions. It is also understood that the saying or phrase does not belong to one particular preacher, but is open for public use and reuse without its being considered

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>161</sup> Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*, 98-104; Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 119-22.

<sup>162</sup> Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 85.

plagiarism. An example of a stock formula in terms of the crucifixion would be “didn’t he, didn’t he, didn’t he die!” This formula invites listeners into the memory and affirmation that Jesus was crucified, usually just before the celebration and affirmation of the resurrection. In a similar fashion, Mitchell describes stock conclusions, and notes that these phrases are often a part of the celebratory moment of a sermon, without being limited solely to moments of celebration.<sup>164</sup>

As we have seen, the aspect of celebration is not lost in these women’s sermons. They use variations of both celebration and stock formulas in their use of short phrases, which assume that “that which goes without saying” is closely akin to stock formulas. The preachers, through their use of celebration and close language, mimic and reenact a tradition while they simultaneously make improvisation on the tradition via the content of close and celebration. The women’s celebrations have some communally expected content, including Jesus’ life and crucifixion, excerpts from songs, hymns, and spirituals, shared communal sayings, and eschatological aspects. However, their use of the feminine in celebration’s content, in both obvious and subtle ways, is the most explicit form of creative ingenuity. The feminine appears alongside and in combination with celebration’s more expected content.

These women’s improvisation is of real importance when the women place aspects and characters of feminine identity within the celebration moment. The insertion of the feminine raises women’s experiences as a valid and point of literal celebration within the community, even in what can seem to be a passing moment. One reason the preacher’s insertion of feminine identity is successful here is because the feminine is

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<sup>164</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 121.

inserted and employed within the confines of the familiar language and expected form of celebration. Within this practice, the tradition is not discarded but “signified on”<sup>165</sup> in different ways.

The tradition of celebration itself becomes the vehicle through which the feminine interrupts a tradition and style that is based on masculine ideals. This interruption adds another dimension to the ways in which scholars of preaching might discuss the subversive potential of women’s experiences in male-normative contexts and traditions.

The subtlety of this practice belies its subversive potential. In one regard, as they continue and participate in the tradition of celebration, the women interrupt the normative imagery of the preacher by their embodiment as Black and woman. The inclusion of the feminine in the language of celebration interrupts the discourse of the practice itself and potentially interrupts the normative masculine ideas of the gathered community. The women’s use of celebration gains them a hearing with their listeners by using accepted and recognizable language forms, as it simultaneously raises women’s experiences as valid within traditions that are male-preferential.

### **The Means of Interruption**

Historically, interruption is an aspect of women’s preaching traditions. Eunjoo Mary Kim traces the theology and practice of women preachers from the Early Church through the twentieth century, and discusses how the particulars of feminine experiences influence the content and theology of preaching.<sup>166</sup> For instance, as a result of analyzing

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<sup>165</sup> Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>166</sup> Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice through the Ages* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004).

the sermons of women preachers in the medieval and post-medieval church, Kim found key rhetorical strategies used by women who “gave their unique voice to the masculine-oriented church and their respective societies.”<sup>167</sup> Kim notes patterns through which these women<sup>168</sup> use “allegories, tricks, imaginative language and feminine imagery of God” for the purpose of communicating the gospel.<sup>169</sup> These rhetorical strategies of women preachers are significant because they interject feminine experience and imagery into otherwise masculine and patriarchal contexts and conceptualizations of God. Kim argues that women’s preaching as subversive rhetoric takes seriously inclusive language and female imagery of God as it seeks egalitarianism—all while requiring subtlety, training, and exploratory approaches.<sup>170</sup> Kim’s treatment of feminine experiences and subversive preaching is one aspect of her larger treatment of women’s preaching. The feminine experience itself is a means of interruption in preaching; and at times this interruption is more intentionally engaged through purposefully subversive acts that recognize and call forth the feminine experience.

In contrast to Kim, Christine Smith’s earlier work in *Weaving the Sermon* is based entirely on the premise that it is the use of women’s familiar experiences through preaching that women weave their lives with the life of the community and transform traditions.<sup>171</sup> Smith notes that within women’s preaching, and as a major tenant of preaching in a feminist perspective, there is an “interwoven quality” in the use of

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>168</sup> Here Kim specifically engages the preaching of Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>171</sup> Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, 8-10.

“personal stories, creative and imaginative language, and imagery rooted in the female experience.”<sup>172</sup> Smith and Kim are examples of more intentional and directive approaches to the use of familiar experiences in preaching.

By contrast, our preachers seem less intentional and strategic in their use of the feminine. In fact, they tend to use their experiences *alongside* the experiences of children and men. The preachers acknowledge the corporate struggle, and embed their own individual struggles within it. For example, Sharon does not engage the Black problem as one problem, but delineates it as the problem of Black women, the problem of Black children, and the problem of Black men. Thus, she acknowledges the historical commonality of racial discrimination, but not without identifying its unique iterations on individuals within the community.

Although these preachers may not consciously or intentionally use the feminine as subversion in their preaching, their sermon content still functions as an interruption to dominant dispositions within their communities. They accomplish this interruption by both embodying and narrating their own experiences as part of and parallel to broader racial and ethnic marginalizations and struggles. They weave the experience of the feminine into the community’s narrative, but not to the exclusion of the very real communal narrative based on ethnic identity; nor to the exclusion of how ethnic marginalization affects those within the community in different ways. They engage communal memory and experience at the intersections of being both Black and woman. Often, neither identification as Black nor woman escapes the preacher’s grasp.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 15.

The greatest blending of these multiple narratives may be evidenced in the preacher's use of the voiced to give voice. The voices the women engage are not simply expert witnesses; they are either acknowledged wisdom bearers within the community's familial structures and faith communities—such as the saints, grandmama, and mama—or celebrities who are African American, such as Marvin Gaye and Toni Morrison. These preachers exhibit a proclivity for feminine voices that cross all three intersections, using legitimating voices with credibility within African American familial structures and faith communities, and with some notoriety within the greater African American community. When the preachers make explicit choices to include the external voices of African American women as wisdom bearers, they invite and participate in a larger tradition of not only what Teresa Fry Brown explains as African American women handing on spiritual values and moral wisdom across generations,<sup>173</sup> but they also bring the voices of African American women into the midst of the community's engagement.

At best the women challenge both the primacy of the feminine narrative and the primacy of the Black narrative in relation to whose experiences and daily life worlds matter most within the preaching moment. Even as the women potentially interrupt the domination of male experience within their community through the direct engagement with what may be considered feminine experiences, they do not disengage from their community's language and memories. Their improvisation in preaching expands the engagement of familiar experience beyond cultural products within Black preaching, while it simultaneously contends that feminine experiences are not something detached

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<sup>173</sup> Brown, *God Don't Like Ugly: African American Women Handing on Spiritual Values*.

from the cultural productions of the community. They continue this intertwining of Black traditions and women's traditions in their engagement with Scripture.

### **Engaging Scripture: *The Women Preach***

Our preachers engage Scripture in their sermons in two primary ways. The first manner in which they do so is by maintaining a close relationship between Scripture and familiar experience. Within this trend they have a tendency to narrate life and Scripture around one another, each trading off authority in relationship to the other. The second manner in which they engage Scripture is by maintaining a more distant relationship between Scripture and familiar experience. Within this trend Scripture has more authority than life experience, and is often engaged in an expository form for the purpose of gleaning from the text. The preachers use these trends of engaging Scripture simultaneously in their sermons, as opposed to discrete methods that are exclusive one to another. Although these trends function together in sermons, these preachers rely most often on the practice of engaging Scripture in close relationship to daily life. The day-to-day-is at the heart of the matter, and is never far from Scripture.

#### Scripture in Close Relationship to Familiar Experience

In this section, I categorically engage the ways these women preachers rhetorically instantiate the close relationship between Scripture and familiar experience. There are three approaches that dominate their rhetorical practices: narrating familiar experience “out of” Scripture, “into” Scripture, or “by” Scripture. Through their approaches it becomes clear that Scripture has implications for life, while life has implications on the interpretation of Scripture. Neither Scripture nor life experiences are

autonomous from one another; in fact, the two have a comingled existence. Some of the preachers use one approach more often than another approach as it relates to narrating familiar experience out of, into, or by Scripture. However, they often use all three approaches at various times within one sermon, even if one trend is greater relied upon than the other two.

### **Narrating Familiar Experience “out of” Scripture**

When familiar experience is narrated out of Scripture, experience functions as the dominant theme. This primarily means that daily life holds the most authority, and greatly influences how Scripture is used and engaged in the sermon. The major objective is to “show life” with Scripture, and in these occurrences, Scripture is the “see here, this is what we experience” mirror that reflects daily life. Narrating familiar experience out of Scripture can be done as a form of validation or affirmation in order to normalize a life experience. It can be done in a way that explains or answers an existing question or concern in life, as well as to refute or correct a daily life experience.

#### **Affirmation, Validation, & Support**

When these preachers use Scripture to validate, affirm, or support the experiences of daily life, daily life is the organizing principle of the sermon content at hand. As daily life organizes the sermon content, Scripture functions as the mechanism of support in order to verify or give validity to the experience with which the preacher is engaging. For example, consider Louise’s sermon “Postponement and Reconciliation” (which is referenced above), in which she portrayed an African American woman not wanting to reveal her ethnic identity with her sales product. In this particular sermon, her primary Scripture reference is John 11:1-45, which recounts Jesus’ encounter with Mary and

Martha in the resurrection of Lazarus from dead. She explains that this is a story that reveals something about life:

This is another of the **familiar stories from Scripture**. It is a **story that reveals to us that sometimes in life, things do not turn out the way we expected....** It is a **story that touches our lives in so many points along the journey of life...** I believe that **I see through the actions of Jesus** postponement and reconciliation.  
–Louise

Louise makes it explicitly known that the text “reveals” something about life’s experiences. She contends that Scripture shows and/or affirms “that sometimes in life, things do not turn out the way we expected.” Louise uses the story in Scripture to confirm and normalize her listeners’ experiences along the “journey of life,” specifically the times when things do not turn out as expected. Jesus himself is the one who narrates these experiences in what she calls “postponement and reconciliation.” Later in the sermon, with the story of a friend’s decision to “come out” about her ethnic identity, Louise makes a turn to show how life experience mirrored in Scripture, and how Scripture is mirrored in life experience:

But this year, **she decided that she was coming out**. At the trade show she said she went up to the woman who purchased most everything that she put on eBay and **she looked her in the eye and said to the woman, I am** (name), and **the woman was so excited that she reached up and hugged her neck** so hard that she almost dragged her to the floor.... **I am reminded that delay is not denial**, God has you on the radar screen and whatever it is that you want to do that pleases God, God is on your side. –Louise

In using her friend’s experience, Louise makes the turn to say “see this is what is happening here, in life and Scripture; see the realities of delay; see the potential of confusing delay with permanent denial; and see delay not meaning denial.” Without saying these words explicitly, the preacher explains, gives voice to, and validates a familiar experience by the way she constructs the relationship between Scripture and

daily life. For Louise, Scripture's value and her faith claims must be connected to the daily life struggles of living with faith. Most important, Scripture is the means for validating listeners' everyday experiences.

### Reasoning and Answers

The following approach is similar to narrating familiar experience out of Scripture in order to validate and affirm occurrences in daily life. In this approach, familiar experience is narrated out of Scripture in order to explain, give reason for, or give an answer to something occurring in day-to-day living. In these instances, the experiences of daily life drive the preachers' engagement with Scripture as the preachers use Scripture to provide answers, explanation, or reasoning. In Barbara's sermon, "Shaken for a Purpose," Scripture provides the answers to why people are experiencing what she calls "personal tsunamis and earthquakes." In the sermon, she literally recounts the earthquakes in Haiti, Indonesia, and California while comparing the instability of the earth to the instability of our lives, which is perpetuated by lay-offs, stock market crashes, and increased gas prices. Her answer to the question, Why all this "shaking?" is as follows:

Well, the Lord told me to tell you don't worry about your earthquakes... **God is allowing the shaking to go on for a reason. If you haven't read your Bible lately and compared it to the local and national news headlines, we're living in the last days.** The word says that "during these last days, many will fall away from the faith." **God is shaking the church so He can clean it up.** –Barbara

For Barbara, Scripture contains the reasoning for and answers to the instability and tragedy in individuals' personal lives. The answer and reasoning she provides is that God is "allowing the shaking to go on" so that God can do something greater. He primarily wants to clean up the church. She then turns to a specific verse of Scripture from her immediate preaching text, Haggai 2:1-9, to amplify the answer:

Now, **let's answer a few questions today.**

Why go through this shaking? Let's walk through the Scripture. **God says in verse 7, "I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come and I will fill this house with glory."** When you see the word "desired" in this Scripture it means Jesus, the desired hope of all nations. HE will come and fill you with His Spirit. I've just dropped by today, in the few minutes that I have left to tell you that God is allowing some shaking to happen in your life. It is eminent. **The shaking is happening for a purpose.** Some things just seem topsy-turvy right now. **You feel like nothing is stable, the job let you go, your marriage is on the rocks, even your 401-K is in the toilet! The things that once used to give you comfort don't give you comfort any more. Friends who used to be friends aren't your friends anymore.** I don't know about you but **life lately seems like one big earthquake after another....** –Barbara

Barbara uses the voice of God in Scripture in order to provide listeners with the reasoning and purpose for their rocky marriages, threatened retirement funds, and job loss. In Scripture, God's voice narrates a "shaking" that draws the "desired of all nations" to a house of worship filled with glory. Barbara then makes a move to narrate the listeners' experience out of Scripture, as God's desired:

Buildings are not the dwelling places that God desires to inhabit. **God desires to dwell in us,** His church. In the Old Testament, they believed that God's spirit resided mainly in the temple. In the New Testament, **God desired to fill the temples of the individual believer rather than a building.** –Barbara

She wants her listeners to know that they, as individuals and as the church collective, are the desired of God. In this trajectory, through God's voice in the Scripture, she provides them with the purpose for their trials:

God knows that everyone will not survive the shaking. But **He's allowing some rain to fall in your life for a purpose.** He's shaking to get the desired or the remnant. That's why every trial you go through you ought to "count it all joy" because **God is just saying, "Sweetie, I just want to perfect you for my kingdom."** –Barbara

Barbara now joins the listener's experience of "rain in life" with God's purpose in Scripture "to fill this house with Glory." God "perfects" individuals through trials,

because God desires them to be a part of the “kingdom,” the house full of glory. As the trials of the preacher’s world and the listeners’ world determine her engagement with Scripture, Scripture ultimately provides answers and reasoning. The immediate concerns of the preacher and listener’s life world create the framework for engaging Scripture. However, Scripture holds authority over familiar experience because it is the vehicle that dictates reasoning and answers.

### Juxtaposition

Narrating familiar experience out of Scripture through juxtaposition by placing Scripture and daily life in apposition to one another can validate, answer, or refute and correct an occurrence in either daily life or Scripture. When our preachers use the approach of juxtaposition, both Scripture and experience can have authority depending on the purpose being served. If there is something in Scripture that is not congruent with life experiences that the preacher deems good or desirable, the preacher will use familiar experience as a mechanism that refutes or corrects what has taken place in Scripture. In these instances, familiar experience holds the greatest authority, and is what the preacher relies on in order to establish her claim. In contrast, if there is something in daily living that the preacher deems good or desirable, but that is not congruent with content in Scripture, the preacher will use Scripture as a mechanism that refutes or corrects life’s content. In these instances, Scripture holds the greatest authority, and it is what the preacher relies on in order to establish her claim. Although both forms of juxtaposition occur in the sermons, these preachers have a tendency to utilize the “good and desirable” content of Scripture for the purpose of correcting the “bad and undesirable” in their communities, as opposed to the inverse approach.

Teresa's sermon "Recognizing the Season, Accept It" provides an example of the good and desirable content of Scripture, correcting the undesirable in daily life. Teresa places Scripture in juxtaposition to familiar experience in order to correct and refute behavior in the community. She encourages listeners to recognize and accept the different seasons in their lives, as opposed to resisting change, while using Scripture to correct the listeners' habits of resistance. As the preacher uses this form of juxtaposition, she also uses subtle aspects of Scripture as validation, affirmation, and support. Teresa begins her sermon with Ecclesiastes 3:1 in order to explain and help listeners recognize that "to everything there is a season," and affirm that in life there are turnarounds in time. She then explains to listeners how they miss their season:

**Then how do we miss our season?** Several things:

When **we lose our focus** (take eyes off the cross)

When **we hold on to the past**

When **we don't like the way the Holy Spirit directs us**

(I want to do it another way)

When **we see the option of man over the unction of the Holy Ghost...**

–Teresa

The undesirable behaviors at present day are individuals' tendencies to "lose focus," "hold on to the past," and fail to allow the "Holy Ghost" to direct them during the change of seasons in life. Since the preacher has already affirmed that there are "seasons" through her use of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3, she then turns to Thessalonians Chapter 5 as a way to correct the tendency to "fight for our own way" instead of following the tide of seasons:

**We have to stop fighting for our own way and accept the Divine interruption in our lives...** Yes, Divine interruption does shake us up but **1Thess. 5:8-9** tells us to be sober and wear faith and love as our breastplate and the hope of salvation as our helmet... **In other words: clear our minds, cover up, and move forward...** we have missed some of our season changes.... **So—Change Your Mind and God will Change Your Season!** –Teresa

For Teresa, Scripture prescribes a change in her listeners' behavior. Literally their thinking should be grounded in faith, love, and the hope of salvation. Scripture's prescription is in correction to the listeners' current thinking, which causes them to miss out on the activity of God around them in season changes.

Vicki's sermon "The Silence We Keep," provides one of the few examples of our preachers using experience to refute and correct the content of Scripture as it simultaneously shows how the preachers' engagement with experience and Scripture coexist. Vicki preaches from 2 Samuel 13:19-20, where the rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon is recounted. After being raped, Tamar is told by her brother Absalom: "Be quiet, for now my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." The resolution in the immediate narrative of Scripture is that neither Tamar's father, King David, nor her brother Absalom confronts her brother and rapist Amnon in their knowledge of the violence against her. Instead, both father and brother remain silent in a greater allegiance to the household and the family.

Vicki first uses Scripture as a mirror for the support and validation of familiar experience whereby Scripture demonstrates her community's tendencies in daily life:

**Just like our sister Tamar, we have a tendency to devalue our existence by keeping silent about childhood sexual abuses** we have suffered, in order to avoid exposing our families to public humiliation. **As African Americans we place greater value on the opinions of those we love as an entity**, as opposed to the individuals who constitute our "skin and kin." –Vicki<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> The preacher included a footnote indicating her adaption of "skin and kin" from a sermon by ethicist Katie G. Cannon, delivered at Washington National Cathedral in May 2007.

Vicki implicates both the victims of sexual abuse for their silence and the community for its complacency and role in valuing solidarity over individual sanctity. She then moves to using juxtaposition, as she deems the resolution in Scripture problematic and undesirable:

Tamar lived in patriarchal times and within a situation of life far different from our lives today. **Our response to sexual violence within our family does not have to be the same as hers.** Dr. Valerie Bridgeman Davis suggests that while “it is unfortunate that **Tamar’s community forced her to carry the guilt and shame and forced her to live her life as a desolate woman living in her brother Absalom’s house,**” that does not have to be our present reality. As the virgin daughter of the King, her options were limited yet **as honored and beloved daughter(s) of *THE KING* our options can be far different.** –Vicki

Using the voice of the “expert” Hebrew Bible scholar Valerie Bridgeman, the preacher claims that the resolution to rape and violence in the narrative of Scripture does not have to be the resolution to rape and violence in our lives today. She articulates that our “options” today, as “honored and beloved daughters” of God (*THE KING*), are not as limited as Tamar’s options were as a “virgin daughter of the king.” In this instance, Vicki does not want Scripture to be modeled in daily life, but wants the actions of her community to correct both the undesirable aspects of Scripture and the undesirable in its midst:

**If we continue in this way, generations of our kindred will suffer wounds of the heart and mind that the body cannot easily expel.** Our communities and households will continue to lose its great thinkers, dreamers, preachers, artists, daughters and sons because of the psychological and spiritual damage inflicted upon them.... **If we do not change the dysfunctional course we have embarked upon perpetrators will be free to abuse more children; the cycle of violence, unchecked,** will continue and millions of our clan and tribe will suffer in silence.... – Vicki

For Vicki, following the resolution in Scripture’s narrative has consequences too great within her community. Instead, she calls listeners to recognize the tragedy of this end in the biblical story, and not to replicate it in their community. For, if they continue to keep

as silent as Tamar, David, and Absalom, the “kindred will suffer.” In this instance, she envisions life and faith in God as something different from that which Scripture delineates.

Vicki places Scripture in subordination to experience; however, in the end, she puts both Scripture and the present day actions of her community in subordination of a yet to be achieved, but desirable, resolution to silence around sexual violence. Ultimately, the preacher’s claims rest in the authority of her larger theological understandings. The preacher is making a bold move, and claims faith’s authority over both her community’s experience thus far, as well as Scripture. Scripture continues to hold value in her attending to it, as opposed to leaving it unattended; however, the preacher’s understanding of life with faith and God also allow her to subjugate the authority of Scripture to her God-talk (which will be further discussed in Chapter IV). For Vicki, yes, Scripture is valuable, but not valuable enough to put the well-being of her community or the understanding of God’s vision at risk.

### **Narrating Familiar Experience “by” Scripture**

As our preachers narrate familiar experience by Scripture, they place authority most constantly *in* Scripture, as opposed to the interchange between the authority of Scripture and the authority of the daily life world that are often found in the patterns of narrating familiar experience out of Scripture. When preachers narrate familiar experience by Scripture, they have an intention to instruct listeners in daily living as it relates to the life of faith. The preachers direct listeners in living a life of faith in the daily realities of human existence. This approach is almost one of discipleship through preaching. The approach is enveloped by moral and/or ethical dimensions, with

implications of what we “ought to do.” They use phrases like, like “you should,” “we are called to,” “we learn,” “we need to understand,” or “the lesson we see here/learn.” If a formula or equation were used to describe this approach, it would look similar to this: the Scripture says = therefore, we should. Narrating *by* Scripture is more direct than narrating experience *out of* Scripture, which is demonstrated in its more uniform occurrence between sermons by different women.

Our preachers use instruction in a way that is similar to reasoning and answering, in that they both provide some form of answer. However, the difference between instruction and the process of reasoning and answering is that the answers of instruction are not necessarily grounded in the premise of explaining or giving purpose to some occurrence in daily life. The intentions in instruction are to provide guidance based on Scripture, answering the questions: “what should we do?” and/or “how should we live?” For instance, Barbara uses the narrative of King Jehoshaphat going into battle from 2 Chronicles 20:1-23 as a mechanism to instruct listeners in what they should do “if they are against all odds”:

**So, if you are a real person with real issues and need a real solution...let me show you a real God that can show up and show out. Let's look at the text and find out what we should do if we are against all odds.**

**What do you do?**

**a. Stand up! - verse 5 says, then Jehoshaphat stood up.... b. Stand still-** After Jehoshaphat stood up and prayed this prayer of faith ...**He [God] says [in verse 17] “you don't have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you.”... c. After you have stand [stood] up against the enemy and stand still in battle, it's time to start singing-verse 22, “as they began to sign and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir...and they were defeated.” Your praise confuses the enemy....** –Barbara

Barbara offers “a real solution” to her listeners based on the desire to know what they “should do,” as opposed to “why is this happening?” She then takes the listeners through

a verse-by-verse exploration that uncovers the answers, instructing them to stand up, stand still, and sing as King Jehoshaphat did.

Louise uses each character from the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-23, to teach those gathered a lesson:

**“the father teaches** us we should give, but never give up; **the son has a message for us**, Be careful how you use it, you could lose it...” -Louise

The preacher’s instructions account for the community’s engagement with others; she directs listeners to offer support (give) and have hope (never give up) in the ability of others to return when they have strayed from the path, just as the father of the prodigal son teaches. She also instructs the community by warning them about squandering what they have been graciously given, as the prodigal son misused and lost what he was given.

These preaching women not only use instruction to help listeners determine what to do in a time of crisis, but also use instruction as a moral compass providing guidance for how one should live. We can see this in Patricia’s engagement of the Cain and Abel story of Genesis 4:

**Let’s go to the 8<sup>th</sup> verse.** As I did research on this verse, it was mentioned that **Cain talked to Abel to get him to come in the field with him. People will set you up.**  
– Patricia

Patricia engages a specific verse in the immediate text to show how people will “set you up” in interactions with them. She then references the content of Thessalonians 5:22 in order to instruct listeners in how they should interact with others:

**As Christians, we need to ask God for a spirit of discernment. You need to know what doesn’t feel right and what does feel right. The Word says to abstain or stay away from the very appearance of evil. If it doesn’t look right, smell right, walk right, or talk right, nine times out of ten it is not right.**  
–Patricia

Patricia tells her community they must ask for spiritual discernment; however, the key to this discernment is their ability to recognize evil, as they seek to “abstain from evil.”

People are to live in a way that keeps them away from evil, through prayerful discernment. The preacher’s instruction is forthright.

Along with instruction in times of crisis and instruction for moral guidance, the preachers use Scripture for more overt means of instruction in discipleship. Valerie makes evident her intentions to lead the community in “Devotion to the Lord, as a Pastor”:

**Beloved, as your pastor it is my heart’s desire that you ...move from mere membership, that is spectator-ship to discipleship! A disciple who is devoted to the Lord and then lives that devotion out in community. Christ said in Luke 9:23** for those who want to follow me, who want to be my disciples, those who want to devote their life to me, here are my requirements, you must be willing to: Deny Self, Take up your Cross daily, and follow me! Christ is calling not for members but for disciples. Disciples who understand that our relationship with God is to take priority over yes even our works and yes even the very blessings we have received from his hand.... –Valerie

Valerie’s desire to lead and instruct the community in discipleship is based in the charge of Jesus that true disciples “deny self, take up your cross daily, and follow me.” Valerie then turns to Mary as a disciple, in Mark 14:1-9 her sermon’s primary Scripture text. Mary is the one who “demonstrates the importance of devotion” even when she is criticized:

**...we can learn from Mary in our text today as she beautifully demonstrates the importance of devotion** over mere religious duties... **But how should you react when you are attacked by this devilish problem (criticism)? Look at how Mary reacted** to the criticism she received from the disciples. She just keeps quiet as Jesus defends her. –Valerie

Mary's actions and reactions offer guidance to the listeners about "how they should react" to criticism as disciples. As Mary keeps quiet and allows Jesus to defend her, as true disciples we too should keep quiet and allow Jesus to defend us.

When our preachers narrate familiar experience by Scripture, they intentionally use Scripture to instruct and guide individuals in their daily life worlds. These instructions may include warnings, moral implications, and specifications about how a person of faith functions in life and or responds to what happens in life. The preachers use their interpretive agency to make unabashed claims about the relationship between life and Scripture and to derive meaning from Scripture.

### **Narrating Familiar Experience "into" Scripture**

In narrating familiar experience into Scripture, our preachers maintain the greatest equilibrium between the authority of Scripture and the authority of daily life. In this approach, daily life and experience run parallel to each other, and at times collapse into one entity. The people in the Scripture may suddenly become present-day listeners. The images of the text may be replaced or constantly exchanged with present-day images. The parallels and collapses between Scripture and experience are often anachronistic. The preachers use a means of strong identification between the world and people of Scripture and the world and people of their communities. They take great liberties in expanding and narrowing the text for their communities. In these liberties, they demonstrate a familiar comfort with Scripture and interacting with Scripture.

When life collapses into the text, images and the conditions of the preachers' and listeners' lives suddenly appear in the narrative of Scripture. Louise places her and her listener's life world into the narration of the story of the prodigal son. The preacher

acknowledges what she is about to do: “Jesus does not put a name on the individuals in this text; I suppose that is so that each of us could see what it would be like to lose something that is near and dear to you.” She also gives individuals permission to “see themselves” in the text, write themselves into the story of the unnamed, and then narrate their world into the text:

The unsuspecting young man did not know that the **money would run out so soon**. And **the economy took a nose dive and with all of the partying that he had done**, there was **no money and no job prospects**. Living such a rich life, everything that he had was gone. Friendless, no family connections, no employment, **unable to purchase new tires for the car, no money to pay the condo note**, he was becoming desperate. And my friends, desperate people take desperate measures. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to feed the pigs.... –Louise

The woes and desperation of people during the 2011 economic crisis have collapsed and become inseparable from the hardship and desperation of the prodigal son. Louise describes the economy taking a nosedive, job prospects running out, needing new tires for the car without having the money to pay for them, and having no money for the condo rent. The desperation of individuals in 2011 *is* the desperation of the prodigal son. She has just removed the temporal separation that could potentially exist between the text and her listeners, almost forcing their identification with the situation of Scripture based in her understanding of the inner work principles of the narrative.

There are also times when the preachers bring biblical characters and stories into their world. This practice is an inverse of Louise’s engagement with the prodigal son above. Sharon brings Jesus to the steps of the church where she is preaching in order to ask the congregation a question as they enter worship:

**If Jesus stood on the steps outside of this church and asked each one of us as we enter the building “Who do you say that I am?”....** How would our worship look? Would we act quirky, show spontaneous acts of kindness, actually

say to someone come share my pew, would our giving in offerings be unpredictable, or would we cry ugly tears of joy when we sing the songs of Zion.  
–Sharon

In Sharon’s narration, Jesus poses the question “Who do you say that I am?” She is not narrating a random question, but utilizing the same question Jesus asks his disciples in Matthew 16:13-20, which is the Scripture she chose for the sermon. Sharon brings Jesus into the real life world of her and her listeners, while those gathered now become the very disciples that are in Matthew 16:13-20. She is probing for the “real life Peter” in her midst who will say, “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.” In this way, she uses Jesus as an imminent and living being engaging the immediate life of the community.

When the preachers narrate familiar experience into Scripture, there is an almost seamless overlap between the world and text of Scripture and the daily life world of the community. Their objective is to show the relevance, implication, and significance of Scripture in daily life through minimizing the distance between Scripture and life experiences. Therefore, our preachers run the content of Scripture parallel to the life, and at times entwine the entities of life and Scripture.

#### Scripture & Familiar Experience At a Distance

There are times when these preaching women engage Scripture at a distance from familiar experience. They do not completely abandon familiar experience; however, familiar experience is put in service of creating and/or expanding an understanding of a particular text. The preacher places an emphasis on “getting inside of” the text, and assists listeners in seeing the inner angles—especially when the feminine is present in the Scripture. The text holds the highest authority in this approach, in that there is something

meaningful that needs to be unearthed and understood from Scripture for its own sake. In order to “get inside” the text, the preacher may “fill out the story” of Scripture for listeners, or meticulously treat the details within a passage. As the trends in the aforementioned approaches suggest, filling out the story and meticulously engaging Scripture often occur together in service to the same purpose: namely, understanding Scripture.

### **Filling Out The Story**

When our preachers fill out the story, they expand the details and information beyond that which is immediately on the page. The preacher may fill out the story by unearthing historical premises about the passage and the world of Scripture. The preacher may make use of imaginative elaboration to further clarify and amplify seemingly scanty material and information. Filling out the story could closely resemble the collapse of worlds that occurs when narrating familiar experience into Scripture, and is a part of the build-up in conveying truth. The differences between collapsing worlds of Scripture and today and filling out the story reside in their objectives. The objective of understanding a text for its own sake, filling out the story, is different from the objective of showing the immediate implications and significance of a text on the daily life world, narrating familiar experience into Scripture. We witness the intentions of filling out the story when information and imagination are used to “turn up the volume,” or increase awareness around some aspect of Scripture. Our preachers utilize information and imagination in both expansive and succinct forms.

Preachers often use history as one way of providing additional information in order to facilitate understanding. Vicki utilizes very expansive forms of historical

information in her sermon based on Mark 14:3-9, in order to help her listeners understand the magnitude of the sacrifice a woman made in anointing Jesus' head with expensive oil, and why those watching the woman criticized her action as a frivolous misuse of money. Vicki is immediately addressing the third verse of the text, which reads "a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment or nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head." In her normal pattern, Vicki pulls on the expert witness; in this sermon, the expert is Charles Long, an African American historian of Religion:

... **Oil is used to** anoint kings, dignitaries and is used in varieties of celebrations.... –Vicki

Vicki explains the utility of oil in the biblical world, and that it was used to anoint kings, dignitaries, and in celebrations. She then explains why the oil the woman used was so costly and precious:

It is not indigenous to Palestine but in fact is so **costly because it is imported from the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal India...the distance the oil has to travel to must be calculated into the cost.** ... The distance between where the oil begins and ends its journey is over 3,700 miles. You could leave from right here in Washington, DC and travel to San Diego California and still not cover 3,700 miles. –Vicki

The oil is costly because it had to travel from India to Bethany. Though the regions of manufacturing are not a part of Vicki's passage of Scripture, she uses the additional information to show how the type of oil, the distance it had to travel, and the cost of "paying the workers' time and talents" drove up the oil's final price. Vicki then continues to explain that a lengthy process called "steam distillery" was used to extract the oil, while she describes the oil's "balsamic, bitter, and spicy" fragrance. She calculates the cost of pure nard in its one-ounce, eight-ounce, and thirty-two-ounce packaging. And

only then does the preacher return to the initial words of Scripture that evoked the “filling out”:

**It is this costly ointment this woman in Mark is bringing to Jesus** as oil for the pouring. –Vicki

The preacher used all of the additional information in order to turn up the volume on the cost of the oil, for the purpose of helping listeners understand the woman’s actions and surrounding controversy. Understanding the cost of the oil is of real importance to Vicki’s later claims about the passage; therefore, her listeners need more insight about the costliness of the oil the woman offers as it will eventually relate to the costliness of the sacrifice they are being called to make. For Vicki, without understanding the internal dynamics of Scripture, one cannot understand the major claims Scripture has on our lives.

Just as Vicki uses a great amount of historical and external information in order to promote understanding, Sharon uses a more succinct form of illustrative elaboration to do so. Sharon describes John 8:1-11, and narrates the story of “the church folk” bringing a “nameless woman,” supposedly caught in the “very act of adultery,” before Jesus and “into the hearing of all the people that were gathered.” She immediately replaces the original presence of the “Scribes and Pharisees” as instigators with “church folk” who are equally intrusive. She draws attention to the fact that the writer did not “name” the woman, but instead called her a “nameless woman.” Sharon has now set the stage for understanding the woman as being thought of as an insignificant pawn in the hands of those who were religious.

Sharon then uses imaginative elaboration to help listeners understand the “shame” and “dehumanization” of the event, as the woman was brought before Jesus as he wrote silently in the dust:

Jesus said nothing. **Can you imagine being in the place of this woman, your clothes hanging off, your embarrassed, shame-faced tears running down and you hear the gasps [gasps] of the people surrounded?** And Jesus said nothing. –Sharon

As she imagines and fills out the story, describing the woman's teary, ashamed face and hanging clothes, she asks her listeners to engage their imaginations as well:

**This dehumanized woman pushed to the ground to only stare at and smell the dirty feet of her accusers and now in the presence of the king of Kings and Lord of Lords,** waiting for His verdict and he said nothing. –Sharon

She places the woman on the ground staring at and smelling dirty feet before she moves back to addressing Jesus' silence. The information Sharon provides is not a part of the passage but serves as a means for filling out the emotional gaps of the woman's story, which exists between the leaders questioning Jesus about her fate and Jesus' actions of drawing in the sand. As she fills out the Scripture's narrative, Sharon's choosing to meticulously treat the scanty character development of the nameless female is noteworthy. Here, Sharon picks up on these women's larger tendencies to meticulously engage texts that involve women and/or difficult content.

### **Meticulous Engagement**

Our preachers have a proclivity to giving Scripture close and detailed attention when a female protagonist or antagonist is involved, especially when the woman is in a tough situation. Their meticulous engagement of Scripture does not exclude filling out the story, but they fill out the story with very intentional content.

For instance, in Sharon's sermon above, in which she fills in the absent emotions of the woman, she then introduces other "scandalous women" into the narrative of Scripture via Jesus' subconsciousness and actions:

**Bowed down Jesus looks at the woman in her shame**, and feels her pain and he begins to write in the dust of the ground. We are not told what he wrote but **maybe He wrote –**

**Grandmother Ruth, went into Boaz’ place** and uncovered his feet at night.  
**My cousin, Rahab was a prostitute.**

**My mother, Mary, became pregnant before marriage** and had the death sentence to be stoned placed on her?

I wonder if Jesus remembered **his Aunt Tamar...** the daughter of King David [who] was **raped** in the king’s palace. –Sharon

Jesus is now writing the names of women from his genealogy into the sand—women who could be questioned about their own bodily engagements. The preacher brings Jesus, Ruth, Rahab, Mary, and Tamar to the defense of this woman’s shame and as counter witnesses to the religious leaders’ accusations. The preacher sifts through the genealogy of Jesus and the portraits of women in Scripture in order to create an understanding around the shame, dehumanization, and injustices in the passage. Sharon’s remaining in the mode of narrator without expressing any present-day implications is of real importance. Her purposes are to get inside of the phenomena of the passage in order to help listeners see a more complex angle of Scripture. While Sharon excavates the primary narrative of the text—Jesus and the woman before him—she excavates the past narratives of women in Scripture, including Ruth, Rahab, Mary, and Tamar.

As these preaching women engage female protagonists and antagonists, they overlap with one another in the Scripture passages they engage. For instance, both Vicki and Sharon engage Tamar’s rape, as found in 2 Kings 19:13-20, albeit in different ways and for different purposes. At the same time, however, neither preacher misses the shame associated with the violence that Tamar’s family committed against her. In a similar way, Valerie, Louise, and Barbara engage the sisters Mary and Martha and their interactions with Jesus, placing an emphasis on discipleship. Vicki and Valerie use Mark

14:1-9, where a woman anoints Jesus with expensive oil. Both preachers focus on the risk, the ensuing criticism, and the magnitude of the sacrifice she made. However, in contrast to Vicki, Valerie takes great lengths to unearth the identity of this woman, to articulate the woman's background with Jesus, and to give her a name. Vicki leaves her unnamed but fills out her story in other ways.

Valerie's decision to narrate the woman's history with Jesus and give her a name shows the preacher's attention to the woman's unnamed status in Scripture, as she is only called "a woman":

**While Mark does not mention her name, we know from the other Gospel accounts that her name was Mary. And, because of what she did, God gave her status for all time. –Valerie**

By using other passages of Scripture to fill out the narrative with details, Valerie makes this woman someone to pay attention to. The first detail we receive is her name, which is Mary. Valerie makes it explicit that, because of Mary's actions, she has "a status of all time." Clearly, the unnamed woman turned Mary is the protagonist. She then establishes Mary's legendary history with Jesus:

**Well, this is the same Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus when her sister Martha got upset that she wasn't in the kitchen helping her... LUKE 10:38-42**  
**She is the same Mary whose brother Lazarus died, and when she saw Jesus coming, she ran out and fell at his feet worshipping Him.** She had no problem showing her love towards the Son of God. JOHN 11:1-47...  
**And she is the same Mary mentioned in today's Scripture; the one who poured expensive perfume upon Jesus. She did this because she worshiped Jesus and loved Him – in the way that all should love Him... –Valerie**

Mary is a devoted disciple, one who shows her love to Jesus through worship even in sorrow, and makes expensive demonstrations of her love for him. Ultimately, Mary loves and worships in the way that we all should love and worship God. Valerie does not allow the unnamed woman to slip through the cracks; instead she gives great attention to

reclaiming this woman as Mary through scriptural citations. Although Valerie draws out the implications between Scripture, daily life, and how we should love God, naming the unnamed woman was her initial purpose in providing additional information and details. Valerie's intentions were to foster a better understanding of the Scripture she was engaging, and Scripture itself became the means to understand the female protagonist of the narrative.

Overall, these preaching women make explicit interpretive decisions about Scripture, which are neither subtle nor suggestive in their sermons. Forthrightness and intentionality are present in their interpretive decisions, be it to expose the feminine experience, or to expose significant details of a passage that relate to the Scripture's claims upon the lives of listeners. In both instances, Scripture holds value, and our preachers display a great level of comfort engaging it for and on behalf of their communities.

### **Engaging Scripture: Talking Back to “Structuring Structures”**

Through their sermons, our preachers contend that Scripture is valuable by explicitly attending to Scripture. They take liberties with the shifting authority Scripture is allowed within the lives of their communities. This shifting authority involves the constant interplay and trade-off between Scripture and familiar experience. When Scripture and daily life are in closer proximity to one another, they ground each other. This mutual grounding of life in Scripture and Scripture in life entails Scripture's functioning as the mirror for what occurs in everyday life, Scripture's providing the moral compass and guide for daily life, and Scripture's and daily life's frequent collapse

into one another. Scripture and familiar experience are not separate entities, but are inextricable from each other, and constantly work together for the women's purposes of proclamation. There are instances in which Scripture and its exploration take primacy over familiar experience; when this happens, the daily life world becomes a tool for further exploring some particular aspect of a passage as a means of "getting inside" of it. Most often that which is familiar to listeners is used to fill out the story of absent details, with great detail given to passages that involve a female character.

In both Black preaching and women's preaching literature, engaging Scripture has centered on the preacher's proximity to the Bible and its use in her preaching. Similar to the use of familiar experience, elements are present within these women's engagement with Scripture that are very similar to the descriptors homileticians use to explain the ways in which Scripture is engaged and functions within Black and women's preaching. The women's approach to Scripture has commonalities with aspects of engaging Scripture that are understood as imaginative elaboration, identification, and encounter. Again, the affinity between these women's sermons and present-day descriptors lies in their blending the described practices and creating an amalgamation of those practices. The women own Scripture within the community as "our Scripture" and "our story" while they function as interpretive agents making interpretive decisions.

#### Scripture As Our Story

For many of our preachers, Scripture is *our story*. In Black preaching traditions, it is often engaged as the story of Black people. The biblical stories that engage the plot of struggle, plight, and redemption are regarded as the Black story of struggle, plight, and redemption. Preachers and communities have owned these stories, and re-presented the

biblical story within preaching in very distinct ways. For example, in Sharon's sermon "The Tenacity of Humanity" she explicitly names the Canaanite Problem in Matthew 15 as "the problem of Black people." As Sharon preaches and makes this identification, she continues a historical foundation of Black preaching traditions; namely, making the Bible "my story." However, Sharon did not stop at naming the story as my story or "the problem of Black people"; rather, she expanded the story to the problem of Black women, the problem of Black children, and the problem of Black men. In essence, the story of Scripture becomes our story, and as our story, multiple vantage points within the community's narrative and within the biblical narrative are engaged.

Our women's tendencies to attend to multiple vantage points, especially those points that are often left unattended, follows in the trajectory of women's preaching traditions. Within such traditions, preaching from within the unattended areas of familiar biblical stories is a common practice. In addition, past women have relocated their authority for interpretation and Scripture within their encounters with Scripture. This relocation of authority expands what could be narrowly considered valid interpretations, which makes room to reject or adopt Scripture as good news. These preaching women own Scripture as *our story*, which equates to Scripture's being a story that attends to Black and feminine experiences—a story that they have the ability to interpret.

### **The Foundational Narrative**

In both its oral and written traditions, the Bible is described as a central aspect of Black preaching;<sup>175</sup> and, as center, it informs the ways Scripture is engaged. Henry

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<sup>175</sup> LaRue, *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*, 10; Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 57-58.

Mitchell names “identification” as a strategy for engaging Scripture in Black preaching. Key aspects of “identification” entail the “Bible as my story,” and “imaginative elaboration” as a means of making the links and relaying the story.<sup>176</sup> Understanding the Bible as my story means that there is minimal differentiation between the biblical stories, their characters, and their situational dilemmas, and those of the preacher and listener. Thus, the “story” of the Bible is the story of Black people. This can be seen in the strong identification African Americans have made with the “Exile and Exodus” motifs of Ancient Israel.<sup>177</sup>

The emphasis in preaching is not in digging behind the text for its historical and literary significance and accuracy. On the contrary, the Bible is meant for preaching good news/gospel, and aspects of history and literary form are minutia within this larger agenda. This does not mean that historical and literary aspects of Scripture are not utilized; they are utilized in service to the penultimate message. At the end of the day, the Bible is “gospel not science.”<sup>178</sup> Therefore, the use of “imaginative elaboration” is key in relaying the story, or putting “flesh on the often-skeletal narrative of the Bible.”<sup>179</sup> Imaginative elaboration entails the preacher’s adding details that may not be present in Scripture, but are the guesses, hunches, and picture painting of the preacher—it is dramatizing Scripture. This could include using concrete situational aspects of present day lived experience in an anachronistic way to further fill-in the biblical narrative. Here,

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<sup>176</sup> *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 63-39.

<sup>177</sup> For an in-depth descriptive of African Americans and the Bible, central motifs, and the importance of an oral-aural tradition in its reception, see Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*.

<sup>178</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 59-60.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

there is slippage between engaging Scripture and the use of familiar experience in Black preaching, because the literary tropes that are usually associated with using familiar experience in preaching (i.e. simile, figurative language, analogy, etc.) may also be very present as a means of identification in engaging Scripture.<sup>180</sup>

The women's choices to place Scripture's content parallel to life and at time entwining the two entities of life and Scripture is very similar to ideas of identification as described in Black preaching literature. When these preaching women narrate familiar experience out of, into, and by Scripture, they are continuing the foundational narrative of Black preaching traditions. For the Black woman preacher, *the Bible is my story*. The choices they make in the aspects of Scripture they highlight, the content with which they fill in the story, and the ways in which they attend to the characters is what expands this foundational narrative of the Bible from *my story* to the Bible as *our story*. They have a tendency to meticulously employ narratives involving female protagonists and antagonists. They use feminine experiences and imagery from the daily life world to expand and illuminate particular points of Scripture, and in rare occurrences, such as Vicki's sermon, they use their life experiences as authority over Scripture, declaring where a scriptural narrative cannot and should not hold authority over their lives today. The Bible as *our story* is a story for which our preachers are credible interpreters based on where their multiple experiences of life encounter Scripture; including not only their identification with Black stories, but their identification with their own stories.

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<sup>180</sup> I am choosing to categorize aspects of identification as engaging Scripture because of the central role the Bible has in the preacher's use of imagination and controlling the parameters of the story told....

## Expanding the Story

Current literature regarding women's ways of preaching tends to frame the discussion of engaging Scripture within language of encounter. The major premise is that women preach from an encounter with the biblical text. Anna Carter Florence treats ideas of encounter at length within her construction of preaching as testimony.<sup>181</sup> Florence's construction is based on the preaching of historical women who found their authority to speak in their encounter and/or experience with the biblical text.<sup>182</sup> An individual who is bearing witness or giving testimony about her experience relocates the validation of the interpretation, or testimony shared, from an external source to the preacher herself as the source of authority. The relocation of authority is of real importance when women's places and roles as valid interpreters of Scripture are challenged. The view of testimony is in radical opposition to more orthodox understanding that there is a "right" or "correct" message to preach from a particular passage. The text refuses to be solved and allows for multiple "experiences" of it; this includes the interpretation or testimony that women bear. Within this understanding of encounter and testimony, the text allows itself to be experienced by the preacher and the preacher retells her experience of the text.<sup>183</sup>

Understanding the engagement with Scripture as encounter in preaching makes room for women as authoritative interpreters, as it simultaneously makes room for their interpretations of Scripture. The preacher's starting point for interpreting and encountering Scripture is of equal importance to the testimonies she bears. Carol Noren classifies two distinct starting places of interpretation that frame preaching women's

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<sup>181</sup> Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

encounters with the Bible.<sup>184</sup> The first has theological and political trajectories, based in feminist and liberationist thought.<sup>185</sup> The second has social and psychological trajectories based on how women have been socialized into western industrial society.<sup>186</sup>

When the preacher engages Scripture within the theological and political framework, she is prone to look at familiar texts but emphasize aspects of the story that are usually left unattended, which includes having the preacher and listeners identify with characters with whom they would not normally identify.<sup>187</sup> Thus, the preacher is more likely to favor narrative texts over didactic texts, seeking the account of God's action in history as opposed to longstanding laws in this framework.<sup>188</sup> The preacher is also prone to assume that the community has a responsibility to "move towards God's new social order, to work for it, to announce it, and train for it" in this framework.<sup>189</sup> Iterations of this theological and political starting point are present in later publications about women and preaching, such as Christine Smith's *Weaving The Sermon: Preaching from a Feminist Perspective*,<sup>190</sup> as introduced in Chapters I and II.

Furthermore, when the preacher engages Scripture within the social and psychological framework, she usually attends to the least powerful characters in Scripture,<sup>191</sup> and is more likely to amplify the biblical story by retelling it through a line-

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<sup>184</sup> Norén, *The Woman in the Pulpit*.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 100-02.

<sup>190</sup> Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*.

<sup>191</sup> Norén, *The Woman in the Pulpit*, 105.

by-line exposition and/or making concrete analogies between the story of the text and the present. She is most likely to focus on relationships within and outside of the text in her preaching in this framework; and in this framework, she is prone to interpreting the text based on her own experiences with internally locating authority.

In considering the two named starting points of interpretation, these preachers enter their encounters with Scripture in both theological-political trajectories and social-psychological ones, all grounded in their experiences and involving risks. For example, in one sermon Vicki rejects Scripture's narrative altogether. Her interpretation is grounded in hers and the community's experiences of sexual abuse. Within her sermon she bears witness to why the narrative cannot hold authority to repeat itself in the life of the immediate community. Vicki calls forth the voices of African American women, the narratives of family and community secrets in the Black struggle to survive, and the experiences of victims of sexual abuse. In this way, Tamar's story becomes subsumed by her story and the stories of others within her community. Vicki's main premise is that to give Tamar's narrative as written prescriptive authority within the community makes the entire community complicit in its own suffering and the suffering of individuals. In being complicit in such suffering, the community moves further away from the vision of God.

Considering the central role of Scripture in Black preaching traditions—and, by inference, within African American faith communities—Vicki engages and deploys a risky interpretation of Scripture. Ironically, the tradition that allows the Bible to be *my story* also allows the story to be expanded. The tradition makes room for Scripture to be encountered by the particulars of the story; including the subjectivities of Black, woman, and sexual abuse victim. Therefore, as the preacher bears witness to her encounter of the

Scripture, her interpretation arises as one that is both authoritative and significant. Vicki's interpretation of Scripture is influenced by the ways in which she makes sense into the text based on experience, and by her understanding of God's vision. In short, the preacher's liberationist hermeneutic directs her engagement with Scripture, but it is further supported by the tradition's strong identification with the biblical story.

Some of these preachers' interpretive decisions do not lead to the same ends as do the decisions made by Vicki, but they do lead to similar interpretive risks and liberties. When our preachers choose to focus on the relationships within Scripture by intentionally directing focus on particular characters in the story and providing narrative details that are not on the page, their experience of the text comes to the forefront. For instance, when the preachers offer a meticulous engagement of Scriptural passages, they often engage the female character who is either marginalized or could be placed on the margins of the narrative via the character's lack of speech. For example, Sharon takes care to attend to the woman allegedly caught in the very act of adultery, although the woman only has one line of speech that is limited to three words. In spite of this, however, Sharon narrates the woman's emotions and invites the alliances of other biblical women into the story as she narrates the conscience of Jesus. She fills-in the story as Black preaching traditions entail, but she fills out the story around the female character, instead of around the teaching of Jesus and the religious leaders who accuse her—all of whom have the most explicit roles in the narrative. For Sharon, identification takes shape in listeners' identifying with the woman's shame, humiliation, undue treatment, and a story that is not isolated to her own. Sharon uses the traditions of identification and filling out the story, all while having a distinct leaning towards the periphery of the passage and the

feminine experience in the narrative. The preachers perpetually use the tradition's tools that are at their disposal, while they unapologetically connect experience—often their own—with their engagement with Scripture.

The understandings of identification and connections between biblical stories' characters and members of present-day communities within women's preaching, holds commonality with the characteristics of identification and connectedness within descriptions of Black preaching. Additionally, the theological-political tenants of women's interpretation retains affinities with the liberationist trajectories that describe the God-talk of Black preaching which will be further addressed in Chapter IV. The emphasis on subjectivity within both Black and women's preaching traditions creates affinities between the two traditions, while the sermons these preaching women offer press the expansion of both. Our preachers press the expansion of both Black and women's preaching traditions, in as far their practices retain feminine and Black experiences as simultaneously significant.

### **Conclusion**

Preachers are aware of listeners' expectations to hear something about both their daily life world and Scripture in a sermon. These preaching women engage the daily lives of their listeners by utilizing communal language and memory, mutual experiences, and the acknowledged authorial voices of their communities. In this way, their use of Scripture and daily life overlap. They have a tendency to keep Scripture closely tied to the daily life world in order to instruct the life of faith, to address common realities of human existence, and to limit the distance between the content of Scripture and the world

in which they live. They also use Scripture in ways that are not as closely tied to daily life for the purpose of understanding the internal workings of a passage. However, these more distant engagements with Scripture are not completely absent of familiar experience; the preachers simply use the daily life world as a mechanism for “getting inside” Scripture. Within these instances, the preachers fill out Scripture with information that is not overtly on the page, but nevertheless with close attention to details. The constant although variant interplay between Scripture and familiar experience demonstrates the high value the women place on sermons addressing both the practical needs of individuals and the sacred texts of their traditions.

As they preach, our preachers extend the narrative of “Scripture as my story,” which is found within Black preaching traditions, to “Scripture as *our story*.” Functioning as authoritative interpreters of Scripture, the preachers often take care to attend to the multiple narratives of their communities, and to make room for their own experiences as they introduce feminine imagery, explore biblical characters and narratives, and engage day-to-day life matters. Here, their sermons intersect with women’s preaching traditions and the history of women bearing witness from their very particular encounters with Scripture, which is marked by their very particular experiences as women. The sermons retain qualities of Black preaching traditions while the tradition simultaneously becomes the vehicle by which our preachers insert their own experiences, thus interrupting/the tradition with their own situational locations as Black and woman.

## CHAPTER IV

### KEYS AND MELODY: CONVEYING-TRUTH AND GOD-TALK

“...we survive in direct relationship to the dedication of our poets (include preachers, musicians, and blues singers).”<sup>192</sup>

#### **Introduction**

There is some form of truth present within a sermon that a preacher tries to convey and that listeners expect to hear. The manner in which ideas are communicated and their content is the means of transmitting truth in preaching. In preaching, the content of truth is often referred to as the “good news.” Listeners expect to hear some significant message, which they deem as the sermon's take-away and inspiration. At any given moment, when conveying an idea, a preacher is acknowledging the existence of truth in a community, promoting a certain kind of truth, and/or responding to a truth already present within a community.<sup>193</sup> This truth entails a delineation of the meaning of the gospel—which is sometimes in part and, at other times, whole—through language and symbols. The means of conveying truth and the places in which truth is revealed arranges the sermon's content and timing. For instance, one preacher may only divulge a “glimmer” of her real message during a segment of the sermon, then slowly reveal the rest of her claim, while another preacher may show all of her cards up front and then explain the truth she has just revealed. Therefore, not only is the content of a truth claim significant in terms of what the preacher deems as the meaning of the Gospel, but how

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<sup>192</sup> Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 184.

<sup>193</sup> McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*, 57.

this meaning is revealed by metering the sermon's style and ultimately the preacher's use of authority is just as important. As a preacher attends to the content of the message and how the message is developed, she is conveying-truth.

In a similar manner, listeners expect to hear something about their beliefs as it pertains to the relationship between the Divine and humanity. God-talk refers to preachers meeting this expectation of theological articulations within their preaching. The analysis of God-talk engages the theological language present within a sermon as well as the ways in which this language constructs a portrait of the relationships between God and humanity. Without a preacher's intentional attention to multiple theological claims as working units within a sermon, we are not likely to find one consistent and fully developed theological portrait within a sermon, but rather a collage of more developed, underdeveloped, and adapted theological constructions.<sup>194</sup> With this in mind, a preacher may use theological language designed to convey varying understandings of the relationships between God and humanity. Multiple theological paradigms may be present within a sermon at once. What we actually see and hear in a preacher's sermon content is more of her operative theology: the working theology(ies) out of which she speaks, lives, and promotes certain meanings and truths. As a preacher gives attention to theological reflection in fragmented and more developed forms, she performs God-talk.

Aspects of the preacher's message to listeners are also transmitted during the exchange of theological ideas in a sermon. Truth and God-talk are mutually linked to each other. As the preachers do God talk, they demonstrate their understanding of what is true as it relates to God and humanity, beyond the manner in which the message is

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

communicated. This chapter pursues categorical understandings of the way in which our preachers' convey truth and do God-talk, as derived from their various approaches to each.

### **Conveying Truth: *The Women Preach***

Our preachers assume a great deal of liberty in their ministerial authority, and rarely invoke language that assumes more passive or temporary proposals when conveying their messages. Their speech is confident, and involves direct language with immediate implications while using aspects of meaning-build-up that sometimes delay or unravel the fullness of their messages. For many of them, there is little to no room for the assumption that they are not sent with a message that has immediate implications for their current contexts as based in their understanding of gospel truth.

#### Confident Speech

One general pattern within the sermons is the use of confident speech as it relates to what is considered truth or intended message. These preaching women are forthright in their language, which communicates that the messages they are conveying are “the messages” to be received. With this in mind, for the most part, they express minimal hesitation about claiming themselves as the sent messengers; instead claiming God as the true sender of the message, or claiming that the message they are communicating is “the truth” without negotiation.

The speech is neither naïve nor authoritarian, assuming the legitimacy of all preached ideas. There are times when the preachers portray the preaching task involving a finite being with emotions, biases, and objections wrestling for a message of integrity

from the Divine. In varying degrees, our preachers are aware of self-imprint in the process of preaching in terms of truth being channeled through a messenger. At the same time, the authority by which they render confident speech seems grounded in an implicit understanding between the preachers and listeners about the preaching task. A narrative of preacher-listener understanding seems to run something like this: the preaching task primarily involves “we the gathered community” trusting that “you the preacher” have spent time in study and prayer, and now have “a word from the Lord.” Within this overarching narrative, our preachers are then responding to expectations regarding the preaching moment, as opposed to assuming power not given to them and speaking in a completely forthright way.

The confidence in the language of these sermons parallels the immediate implications of the practical matters of life present in their God-talk, which is explored in the second half of the chapter. If, over time, their communities have developed an understanding that faith has an immediate and direct impact on everyday life, the preachers are naturally granted permission to not only disclose the immediate implications of the gospel, but to disclose them in a very direct manner. The expectations within the communities to which these women are trusted to bring a Divine message grants the women license to use strong, confident speech, which could be perceived as intrusive or assuming by outsiders.

### **A Messenger on Assignment**

In some occurrences of confident speech, the preacher identifies herself as a sent messenger or as being on assignment to deliver a message. For instance, in her sermon entitled “Coming out of the Pit,” Patricia explains that Psalm 40 is David’s personal

testimony about how he knew that God would change him, and about his commitment to wait patiently on the Lord. Patricia explains David's failures and bad decisions in life, and then tells her listeners that, just like David, they have at some point made a "BIG MESS" and have had to wait on the Lord. Not only does Patricia speak to individuals who have previously had to wait on the Lord, she also speaks to those who are presently waiting on the Lord.

**You are sitting there wondering how**, where, and when is God going to bring you out!!! You must hold on!!

**You may think that God has forgot about you**, because your prayers are still not answered. – Patricia

There are people gathered listening to the sermon who are presently waiting on the Lord, wondering how, where, and when God is going to deliver them. And, just as they are thinking that God has forgotten about them, Patricia now turns to those listeners in waiting and interrupts their thoughts by declaring that she has come with a message just for them.

**But I am here to tell you that God did not forget you** – He said in his Word he will never leave you nor forsake you. **Wait on the Lord.** – Patricia

Patricia is the messenger on assignment with a message for those who think God has forgotten about them. Patricia's "I am here to tell you" implies that, if for no other reason—in fact for this very reason—she is there to communicate a particular message to the person(s) in waiting. Not only is she there to communicate a message to these waiting individuals, but she is confident about the content of that message, namely, to "wait on the Lord" because God indeed has not forgotten about them. Patricia's ability to make such a claim as valid good news and truth is based on her reference to Scripture when she states, "He said in his word he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Our preacher makes an emphatic statement as a counter truth to “God has forgotten,” the claim her listeners have conjured up themselves, based on her confidence in Scripture being an accurate description of the promise of God. Patricia expresses confidence that she is there with the correct message, and the “Word” becomes the warrant for her strong claim. Here, she does not negotiate an understanding with her listeners, nor leave room for her listeners to make such negotiations for themselves. In fact, she declares that the conclusions they themselves have made are inaccurate, and that she is the messenger who speaks a Gospel truth to their immediate life circumstances.

### **God’s Message**

Just as the preacher identifies herself as a messenger sent on assignment, there is an underlying assumption that God is sending the message she delivers, which preachers often communicate. The disclaimers can be as short and as succinct as those of Barbara and Valerie. In her sermon “Are You Ready to Come to the Table,” Barbara invokes listeners to properly prepare themselves for communion, saying:

**Before we come to the table, God says take an inward look at yourself.** Take time to reflect on your struggles. Are you struggling with the same thing every time you come to the table? I guarantee, if you sit down long enough, God will point out everything He does not like. –Barbara

Barbara’s words become the words of God, and her mouth speaks the words of God to those who are gathered. It is God who is saying to listeners: “take an inward look at yourself.” In contrast to Barbara, in the following excerpt from a sermon on the importance of fatherhood, Valerie does not necessarily speak the words of God, but she delivers the message of God as she communicates his thoughts:

**There is no role in our modern society that suffers greater neglect as far as God is concerned than that of the father.** Not only has God given men the

incredible privilege of imitating Him as Father, He has placed upon the shoulders of fathers an incredible responsibility. –Valerie

According to Valerie, God has a great concern over the neglected role of fatherhood; the concern is primarily due to the model and privilege He has afforded men by modeling Him as Father. Our preacher knows the voice and message of God, and confidently communicates this truth as she expresses the extent of God's concerns.

In these instances of God's message, the preacher is the herald who speaks the very words of God or message of God. Therefore, the preacher is not the only one who has a message for her listeners' immediate predicaments, but God himself has a message for the listeners.

In other cases of confident speech the preacher does not necessarily remark that "God says," "I came to tell you," or "God sent me to say"; however, her sent and/or assignment status is implied and assumed through the nature of her direct assertions in a deductive and linear manner. In her sermon "Seasons," Teresa does not await permission to tell her listeners what truth is. In fact, Teresa does not give her listeners the opportunity to guess what her message is or how they should handle different phases and transitions in their lives. On the contrary, within the first five minutes of her sermon she lets those gathered know her message of instruction. Teresa states:

**Three things we need to consider** when it comes to seasons. We need to recognize the season. We need to accept the season. Or we need to change it.  
–Teresa

After stating that her listeners need to recognize, accept, or change their seasons, Teresa proceeds to delineate individually what recognizing, accepting, and changing a season entails. The preacher's speech is very direct with little room for inference as she reinforces her message at various points in the sermon. The message is a response to

those gathered questioning the Lord in the form of “what do I do with this season?” This message is “the message” her listeners are meant to receive because she brings it as a response from God to the inquiries of those gathered. As her message is from God, the message is also forthright and immediate.

### Direct Language with Immediate Implications

Reasonably with assumptions of assignment and a message from God, our preachers identify their messages and make truth claims without equivocation or room for negotiation. They most often use direct, indicative, and active language in their sermons when communicating what the essential Gospel message is to their listeners. Furthermore, as they engage the biblical text and the world around them, neither the text nor today’s world can escape or supersede one another as it relates to making meaningful proclamation and naming their truths. The result of the relationship between Scripture and today’s world is that whatever the preachers deem as truth has immediate implications on and for the lives of their listeners. These implications take shape in an immediate or impending claim about the gospel message. In this regard, the truth these preaching women communicate to their listeners is good news or gospel in the here and now.

Working within this trajectory, Vicki’s sermon “Oil for Pouring” contains confident speech and takes on a level of immediacy. Not only is the message designed for those gathered, but it also has immediate implications for their lives. Vicki preaches from the passage of Scripture found in Mark 14:3-9, in which a nameless woman anoints Jesus with costly ointment and receives criticism from onlookers. As Vicki ends her sermon, she states her penultimate message:

I'm so glad about it because God is not a respecter of person. **What Jesus did for her, God will do for you. Today is your day. Today**, if you hear my voice, harden not your hearts, **Today is your day—it's your day to forgive past hurts, and to produce some oil.**

**It's your day to move beyond guilt** and shame and to produce some oil. **It's your day to come out of destructive relationships** and produce some oil...  
–Vicki

In other words, God will do for those gathered what Jesus did for the woman who anointed him with oil. Namely, God will offer forgiveness and remove guilt so that believers may have an offering of expensive oil in the form of a testimony. She affirms that “today” is the day for those who are gathered to offer forgiveness and be forgiven by God. Today is their day to move beyond guilt and destructive relationships. Her message is not one for future action, nor does it hold the possibility of something occurring later. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The preacher makes her claim as a factual statement for that very moment of delivery. Her claim is based on Scripture and her understanding of this message possesses immediate implications for the lives of those gathered. In this scenario, the preacher's claim collapses the time between Scripture, the ongoing activity of God, and the listeners' world. The good news of God's activity in the lives of believers is accessible and relevant right then, right there, and on that very day.

As Vicki declares an immediate accessibility to present Divine activity, Barbara formulates her message as a command to immediate action for those gathered who find themselves “Against All Odds.” She begins with the question, “What should you do when you're against all odds?” and follows with an expository exploration of 2 Chronicles 20, which recounts the story of King Jehoshaphat and Israel going into battle. Barbara introduces the question, then gives her listeners a direct message of instruction.

Her message of instruction is based on her interpretation of the biblical story and what King Jehoshaphat would tell those gathered. With clarity and forthrightness she states:

**What do you do?**

**Stand up!...** I encourage you today to stand up like Jehoshaphat...you may be standing with shaky knees but just stand up and declare the goodness of the Lord and watch God move on your behalf.

... **Stand still!...** He (God) says, “you don’t have to fight this battle. We have to just stand still in the area of righteousness....

...After you stand up against the enemy and stand still in battle, it’s time to **start singing!** Verse 22, “as they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab” .... –Barbara

Barbara uses imperative, assertive, and deductive forms of language and delivery as a means to instruct, if not command, those gathered to “Stand up!” “Stand still!” and “Start Singing!” in their current adverse situations. “You!” is the implied person and the direct answer to the question of “who is to stand up, stand still, and start singing?” “Now” is the implied time and direct answer to the question of “when to stand up, stand still, and start singing?” The good news the preacher communicates is not something to ponder, or one that has future implications. The good news has a direct recipient and calls for immediate action.

For our preachers, the Gospel breaks into their lives and the lives of their listeners. Their claims about good news have immediate implications for very present life circumstances. Direct, assertive, and active speech is congruent with understandings of immediate implications, and this is the means through which the women deliver good news. Passive and less forthright methods may not have the same force in emphasizing the immediacy of good news and its literal impact on today, during this very hour, and in this very moment.

## **A Messenger with a Direct Word from The Lord**

Indeed, more often than not, these preaching women combine a variation of assignment status, a God message, and direct speech. An example of this combination is present within Louise's sermon "God's Plan—Postponement and Reconciliation," in which, through the story of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the grave, she ultimately claims: "Delay is not denial." The opening words of the sermon establish Louise's authority as a preacher and the authority of her message:

My sisters and my brothers, **I have come to you this morning with a word from the Lord.** –Louise

Louise is the one who brings a message to those gathered that morning. The message is not any message, but "a word from the Lord." This "word from the Lord" indicates the significance of the preacher's message and its sacredness. Louise is not about to make ordinary speech and claims, but instead gives her listeners something that is sacred and holy. And with her opening disclaimer she calls the attention of those gathered to the significance of the message she is about to deliver.

Louise then proceeds to clearly delineate the "word from the Lord." She cues her listeners to the specific "word from the Lord" using indicators of "first, second, and finally":

**This brings me to my first point of the message**, though Jesus loves us, He does not always move on our time schedule....  
Though Jesus loves us, He does not always move on our timetable, **but the second thing I see is** that Delay is not Denial....  
**And my sisters and my brothers**, though God does not work on our timetable and Delay is Not Denial, **finally it's Called Reconciliation.** –Louise

For every claim Louise makes, she summarizes her previous claim before introducing the next. Louise uses a classic three-point-sermon approach as she conveys the Gospel in a deductive manner.

For Louise, her listeners have been waiting and have experienced delay in their lives as it relates to the promises of God coming to fruition. Although she does not promise her listeners that this day is the day of the fulfillment of those promises, she does relay to them that there is a word for today: “I would declare to each of us **today that delay is not denial**,” she tells them. Her words are in many regards an immediate offering of accessible hope. Even as the individuals wait on God, who does not move on their timetable, they need to know that, in this moment, delay is not denial because God is presently waiting and monitoring their situations, which Louise expresses in her statement, “God **has** you on the radar screen.” Even as Louise opens with and maintains very confident speech in both the message she is delivering and in her assignment, she communicates an understanding that she interprets and makes best guesses about the Scripture and the definitive message.

### **Confidence Without Naïveté**

Even as our preachers use very assertive and confident speech, they are not completely naïve about their roles as preachers within their gathered communities. There are times when the preachers seem acutely aware of their identities, roles, and the human imprint on the Divine messages they deliver. For instance, in Louise’s sermon above, she retains the use of “I” even as she maintains that the message is a divine one:

We are continuing our journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and **I contend** that all of the things that occurred on the journey are part of the Divine plan of God for his son Jesus.

**In the midst of my preparation for the text that is before us this morning, I believe that I see** through the actions of Jesus postponement and reconciliation. My friends, do you believe that God has a plan for your life? **Then I would declare to each of us today** that delay is not denial.

**I believe that God is expecting** our actions to align with the word of the Lord, but He also wants it to be our will.

**I believe that God's Plan is** being done for us through the Reconciliation of the many issues that plague our lives. –Louise

Louise communicates that the message is her belief and contention about what is truth, as she marks herself as the one declaring, believing, and contending the message. As a messenger on assignment, the preacher is offering “a word” to the gathered community—those she refers to as “friends” and “my sisters and my brothers.” Although Louise does not fully evoke an egalitarian or collaborative understanding of herself as one interpreter amongst many interpreters, her more assertive communication style does not inherently retain ignorance of her being one individual within a larger community to which her interpretation is responsible.

Instances of confident speech are not necessarily indicative of the preacher's arrogance and, on the contrary, could demonstrate the women's understanding of the real importance of the task and message they are communicating. Our preachers seem to have an understanding that there is weightiness in the preaching moment and little room to communicate an “untruth.” Vicki is one of few preachers who verbally shares the struggle of her preparation as well her insight as to how and where she has derived the confidence that the particular message she is communicating, “Oil for Pouring,” is truly a message from God:

**I wrestled with God and I asked politely for another message.** I asked for another text, **I begged God for relief and I rhetorically questioned whether or not God really intended for me to preach this particular message.** I was in the vice grip for weeks when **God finally spoke in the cool of the evening and reminded me that this message is not about me, not as much as it is about**

**you.** It is not a message to tantalize you but one to teach you. It's not designed to cause you to languish but to launch you into liberation. The message today, "Oil for the Pouring," is taken from the Mark's Gospel and **has been prepared precisely with you in the mind of God....** –Vicki

Vicki depicts herself as "wrestling with God," asking for another message and begging for relief. In preparation for the sermon, she describes herself as being in search of the intentions of God in preaching "this particular message." The preacher affirms that not only did God confirm the message, but God "spoke" to her in "the cool of the evening," reminding her of the greater purposes of the preaching task. This preaching moment and message was given specifically for those gathered as they were "in the mind of God," which supersedes her will as a preacher. With the explication of her struggle, Vicki reveals the source of her confidence in the message she is speaking; namely, her time with God. From struggling with God, she is confident that this message is for those to whom she speaks.

In one respect, Vicki is merely communicating what most of her listeners would assume and hope took place during her time of preparation. Listeners trust that the preacher has prayed, studied, and spent time with God before preaching; indeed, it is the listeners' trust that grants the preachers the ability to have liberty with assertive and confident speech. There is an assumption present between the preacher and her listeners that the message being communicated is a message from God, and the preacher has received her word from the Lord.

Claiming Divine authority of the message and the almost non-negotiable status of a gospel claim does not negate the preacher's awareness of her role, bias, and fallibility as a messenger. In fact, in some instances the preachers demonstrate a heightened awareness of her fallibility and her role in delivering a God-sent message, which allows

her to make her claims in more assertive ways based on her humble understanding of herself as a vessel and conduit of the Divine. The preacher is aware that she is “offering” a truth, but also risking the possibility of getting it wrong, even while expressing unequivocal confidence during the actual sermon. The preaching women’s use of confident delivery and speech makes sense if those gathered expect to hear “a word from the Lord,” which would not be elusive or unattainable but, on the contrary, direct and immediate.

### Building-up to Good News

Although our preachers use very indicative and active means to convey truth, they do not overlook the power of build-up and detail. They have an overwhelming preference for narrative texts; twenty-two out of the thirty sermons engage narrative Scripture passages. With narrative texts, the story is already made for the preachers, and in their sermons they give great attention to repainting or re-telling the story for their listeners. The preachers essentially retell the story of the text, sometimes through present-day experience, in order to elongate, create suspense, or build up to their claims. Not only do the preachers demonstrate build-up through their story telling, but also use familiar experience to make their claims. In many instances, the familiar experience leading up to their fully developed claim is more extensively described than the claim itself.<sup>195</sup> In these instances, familiar experience does the work of convincing listeners or creating expectant

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<sup>195</sup> The use of familiar experience as it relates to conveying truth overlaps with the way the women’s use of familiar experience is described in Chapter III. In this section, I will show in some detail how familiar experience links to the women’s methods of conveying truth; however, these ideas can equally be accounted for in the ways the women engage Scripture in close relationship to familiar experience as described in Chapter III. This phenomenon of overlap between the categories of Scripture, familiar experience, truth, and God-talk are expected due to their not being discrete categories unto themselves, but interacting parts.

receptive listeners via build-up. Their choices of Scripture supports a slower hermeneutic means of developing a message, and the use of familiar experience further facilitates or assists in the build-up up to Gospel claims. However, as the preachers build up to those claims, they often make very assertive statements along the way. As in most instances, they do not use confident speech, immediate truth, or build-up independently, but as working parts that each relate to one another.

### **Building-up to Good News Within Scripture**

Our preachers' most often use build-up to excavate and proclaim good news from a particular passage of Scripture, which has an immediate implication on the lives of those listening. For instance, in Sharon's sermon, "From the Well of Grace," she explicitly states that the good news for those gathered is that "the well of grace never runs dry":

**The Good News is no one is deserving of grace.** For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God does not condemn us... Silently trust and place our hand firmly in His—take a deep breath and begin the exciting journey to a place we thought we'd never find because **the well of grace never runs dry.**

Sharon does not make this declaration of "good news" until the very end of her sermon, and after she has made a series of "mini good news" proclamations throughout the message. Her sermon engages the story of a woman brought to Jesus who was accused of being caught in the "very act of adultery." Though I gave a description of Sharon's recounting this story in Chapter III as a use of imaginative elaboration to fill-in the story, portions of that description follow below.

Sharon narrates "the church folk" bringing a "nameless woman," supposedly caught in the "very act of adultery" before Jesus and "into the hearing of all the people that were gathered." Sharon then uses imaginative elaboration to help listeners

understand the “shame” and “dehumanization” of the event, as the woman was brought before Jesus as he wrote silently in the dust:

Jesus said nothing. **Can you imagine being in the place of this woman, your clothes hanging off, your embarrassed, shame-faced tears running down and you hear the gasps [gasps] of the people surrounded?** And Jesus said nothing.  
–Sharon

As Sharon imagines and fills out the story describing the woman’s teary, ashamed face and hanging clothes, she asks her listeners to engage their imaginations as well. She then places the woman on the ground (staring at and smelling dirty feet) before she moves back to addressing Jesus’ silence. She then follows it with an affirmation that “In God’s silence there’s power at work.” This is a direct statement of good news.

Sharon utilizes build-up to help listeners see and empathize with the woman in the story, as the woman endures the hatred of her accusers and the initial silence of Jesus. The weight of the tragedy of the woman’s circumstance, which is compounded by her shame, is a weight that those gathered can feel by the time Sharon fills-out the story. The very present awareness of guilt and shame is met and relieved by the words of Jesus: “Neither do I condemn you. Go on your way.” Sharon leads her listeners up to the good news about the grace of God, its present implications in their lives, and its worthiness to be celebrated. By the end of the sermon, individuals can affirm, “Yes. It is true! The well of grace never runs dry!” In this instance, the preacher is not attempting to help her listeners see an alternative truth, but is instead convincing them that “This is the truth.” The use of build-up helps facilitate the reception of a very direct and definitive claim.

### **Building-up to Good News Outside of Scripture**

Rarely do our preachers use build-up and confident speech to declare good news that cannot be found in Scripture. Vicki is the only preacher who uses build-up to declare

that good news cannot be found in a particular passage of Scripture. However, she uses build-up in the same manner as her fellow proclaimers, as it relates to elongating the narrative that leads up to her major claims. In her sermon, “The Silence We Keep,” Vicki combines the use of building-up to her gospel claim with an understanding that the Gospel of the here and now may require us to reject the circumstances portrayed in Scripture. She uses the story of Tamar’s rape in 2 Samuel 13:19-20 to claim the good news at present day. Tamar’s story is one that involves her brother Amnon’s raping her, and her being coerced into silence by her male family members, including her brother and father. Vicki devotes half of her sermon to building-up to the claim, which is possible because we the listeners understand the tragedy of sexual violence and silence, and come to realize that we must make different decisions than those recounted in Tamar’s story.

Vicki declares that the good news is that “Tamar lived in a different time than we do now,” with “a situation of life far different than ours.” And, because of this, “Our response to sexual violence within our family does not have to be the same as hers.” However, in order to reject the condition of Scripture being a model template, Vicki takes great care to recount the story and times of Tamar and the present day actions of her listeners prior to saying that the Scripture passage is not good news here and now. In order for her to successfully preach against the passage, she lures her listeners into the disgust and tragedy of Tamar’s situation. Essentially, she “paints the picture” for those listening through adjectives and words that engage the senses of seeing, hearing, and touching. Tamar did not “take to bed” or “lay with Amnon”; nor was she just “raped.” Vicki recounts Tamar’s being “forcibly raped by her brother” and “violated” in “a place one presumes offers safety and protection for womankind.” Vicki then describes a

“bedraggled, surely bruised and humiliated” Tamar with a “torn” once “beautiful garment that only the King’s daughters were allowed to wear,” who now goes about “wailing loudly” only to find “a salve and the balm” of “frustration and agony” in keeping silent.

At this moment, surely, Vicki’s listeners can see, feel, and agree that Tamar’s situation is one of tragedy. It is here that Vicki turns to those gathered to say that, at present, they too have allowed victims to suffer in silence and be unsafe in their own households in order to protect the larger reputation of the community. Because of this silent suffering, communities will continue to lose the “great thinkers, dreamers, preachers, artists, daughters, and sons.” Since listeners can agree to the tragedy of Tamar’s story, and now see the tragedy of Tamar’s story being repeated in their own communities, it is without question that the story of Scripture cannot be good news today; instead, good news must be brought to the passage. Vicki achieves this by explaining how those silenced by abuse can gain voice, since the good news is that we no longer need to be silent.

Vicki’s use of build-up is savvy: she uses the tools and methods of a narrative preaching tradition to offer an interpretation of Scripture that is not normative when compared to the decisions of interpretation and proclamation of good news made by other preachers. Vicki’s choices provide insight into how preachers not only use the tools and structures of a tradition to convey a message, but use the same tools and structures to critique or alter a tradition of thought and practice. Yes, good news that has immediate implications is important, but Vicki changes the sources of that good news; the source is no longer Scripture, but the wisdom from her and her listener’s familiar experiences.

### **Conveying Truth: Talking-Back to “Structuring Structures”**

These preaching women understand themselves as messengers of God who deliver messages with immediacy, and they use confident speech to convey them. As they create and communicate messages, which have direct implications for the lives of their listeners, there is minimum opportunity for listeners to generate or offer a counter proposal based on their own experiences. Instead, our preachers tend to make non-negotiable claims, steeped in their methods of creating or re-creating a common familiar experience with their listeners. This more assertive style of message development and delivery is a part of recognized Black preaching traditions, and is closely related to the perceived responsibility to their communities during the preaching task. The recognition that truth has a communal aspect and responsibility is at the forefront of discourses about women’s preaching traditions. In these sermons, there is a blending of how truth may be typically classified within Black and women’s preaching traditions, as well as a narrowing of the dichotomy that is often placed between understanding assertively-authoritative and communally-authoritative forms of preaching.

#### **Assertively-Authoritative**

Cleophus J. LaRue describes “ministerial authority”<sup>196</sup> in Black preaching, arguing that, within the framework of ministerial authority, the preacher is granted a license by listeners to “make it plain” in telling the gospel, which entails a generous amount of liberty in the “thought provoking exchange of ideas between the text, the congregation, and the preacher.”<sup>197</sup> The intent is to help listeners “understand and

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<sup>196</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 11-12.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

identify” the good news.<sup>198</sup> There is a sense in which the preacher is an expert and is granted the ability to speak from a more assertive and propositional position.<sup>199</sup> Our preachers’ choices to portray truth claims in a more direct, assertive, and highly authoritative manner is logical if this is the primary means by which their communities delineate, interrogate, and receive speech presented as truth. This means of conveying truth is all the more important when considering “Gospel truth.”

Although Black preaching is understood to rely on more assertive forms of delivery, both slow delivery and build-up are aspects of this assertive style, and both elongate the message. When discussing slow delivery, Mitchell describes this as the literal rate of delivery, as in speed.<sup>200</sup> The preacher uses intentional delay in pacing and moves towards more climatic moments, crystalizing the sermon’s idea(s) of truth. The penultimate climatic moment is the point of celebration, which I discussed in the previous chapter as the use of familiar experience. Storytelling and the use of detail are identifiable tools that influence the rate and pace at which truth claims are reached and contribute to the effect of build-up. Build-up and filling-in the story, as described above and in Chapter III, is a characteristic of these more assertive preaching traditions, and meters the forthrightness of the preacher’s direct speech.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> In *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, Samuel D. Proctor highlights the important and assumed role of a proposition to be given in his preaching methodology; see Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority*, 33, 53.

<sup>200</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 96-97.

Assuming that the more assertive styles of Black preaching traditions are accurate descriptors,<sup>201</sup> if the women opt not to use this form of truth conveyance, they risk not speaking in the language of their communities. Speaking in an outsider language would influence their perceived credibility based on insider belonging. If the women lose credibility with their listeners, their authority is undercut and they run the risk of creating unreceptive listeners. Because women's bodies and speech are still contested within pulpit spaces, the women's use of more traditional assertive approaches to truth, based in their communities' traditions, become the vehicles through which their non-male voices and claims are heard and possibly received. To an extent, the tradition has shaped the women's understanding of truth and how it is conveyed, and now these women are using that same understanding to articulate what they are claiming as truth to the community. These preaching women are re-tooling what they have inherited for their pulpit purposes of communicating the Gospel.

#### Communally-Authoritative

Women's preaching literature favors a more lateral and conversational approach to conveying truth. Within this framework, truth is malleable and grounded within the authority of the community's interrogation, even truth offered by the preacher. Truth emerges and is created through the means of mutual community engagement. Eunjoo Mary Kim describes truth as an "ongoing process" that has creative dimensions in women's preaching practices.<sup>202</sup> Communally-authoritative truth seeks to diffuse

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<sup>201</sup> I am not assuming that the descriptors in present-day literature are untrue, but instead that the descriptors do not account for the additions or complexities of including Black preaching women in the discourses.

<sup>202</sup> Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice through the Ages*, 15-16.

hierarchical aspects of power and authority without elimination, and makes its aim the inclusion of voices that have been marginalized. The process could be summarized as the preacher first encountering a passage of Scripture, and through her preaching inviting listeners to encounter Scripture for themselves; in this she makes room for multiple experiences of the text.<sup>203</sup> Understanding truth in this manner within women's preaching is parallel to larger shifts in homiletic literature, which have moved from engaging truth in ultimate, consensus, and hierarchical terms to more heuristic and communal ones.

Lucy Rose, in *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, traces this progression in the conceptualization of truth in preaching and offers a model for conversational preaching.<sup>204</sup> Although, Rose does not explicitly engage the preaching practices of women, her model does seriously engage those who are marginalized in preaching, including women. Rose explains that the conversation, as it relates to the sermon content, is "a proposal offered to the community of faith for their additions, corrections, or counterproposals."<sup>205</sup> Here, the preacher is an individual and interpreter, while the community as a group of individuals and valid interpreters are held in close relationship to the preacher. Truth emerges from both the preachers' and listeners' work.

The description of truth as a conversation is in contrast to the approach present within our preachers' sermons. These preaching women make non-negotiable claims communicated via confident speech, which signifies "this is the message of God for us." They do not offer truth or seek out an exchange in truth; rather, they give truth. Their language is neither passive nor suggestive but very direct and directive. As they give

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<sup>203</sup> Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*.

<sup>204</sup> Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

truth, the women tend to associate their message with an understanding of communal belonging, communal responsibility, and self-involvement in the process. These preachers also convey a close working relationship between the preacher and listeners in decisions about truth, even as they do not tend to present truth as an offer.

#### Communally-Assertive

As noted through their sermons, it appears that our preachers are granted ministerial authority by the community to engage in more assertive and sometimes hierarchical styles of conveying a primary message. This process of granting ministerial authority implies an inherent trust between the community and preacher; namely, that the preacher is a responsible steward over the process of interpretation for preaching through prayer and study, thus giving the preacher greater liberties in speech. What emerges as notable about the sermons are the women operating within ministerial authority while using language that indicates that they are also interpreting agents amongst many.

The messages are from God, but they are not messages detached from the preacher as a person, nor are they detached from understanding the interpreter as an individual within a larger community of faithful interpreters. Our preachers describe themselves as wrestling with Scripture and God, resisting a message to be preached, having their listeners in mind during the preparation process, and in some occurrences, as the ones communicating as opposed to God. In such instances, these preachers are expressing a responsibility to the possible counter-testimonies or offerings of others' (such as Rose) desires, and demonstrate an immediate awareness of self-in-community. Their more assertive styles do not negate communal-authority, but are founded in both communal authority and a listening relationship within the larger community.

Communal-authority responds to counter-testimonies and marginal experiences—such as Vicki’s sermon about Tamar—however, the way in which meaning and truth are managed is far more assertive than what is described in conversational approaches. Although this approach is stylistically different from conversation, it cannot be automatically conflated as less communal or not having affinity with women’s processes of preaching. On the contrary, within these sermons is a blending of communal and assertive ways of conveying truth, which creates the opportunity to think more creatively about both assertive and communal understandings of truth.

As our preachers’ messages contain a right-now truth for the community in communally-assertive ways, they are closely related to an operative theology that promotes a right-now God who is there for the community. These preaching women in their God-talk show both the content of what they deem as truth and the content of their faith.

### **God-Talk: The Women Preach**

Our preachers’ God-talk is inextricable from concrete experience, and gravitates around three major areas: a sovereign and involved God, a relationship, and help in this world. First and foremost, God is sovereign and involved in the lives of individuals, and is always capable of intervening. Second, sin consumes the gap that prevents mediation between God and humanity, and human beings one to another. Therefore, having personal knowledge of encountering God and having one’s sin forgiven is the means of being converted into “right living,” which assures God’s intervening activity in life. The certain presence of an intervening God is significant due to the third and final narrative of

the women's God-talk. When engaging the certainties of the relationship between life in this world and God, our preachers portray assistance or help primarily within the frameworks of self and God. They minimally engage the possibility of others being of reliable assistance during the daily struggles of living with faith. As self- and God-reliance are reoccurring themes in the preachers' understanding of the daily life world, their God-talk almost demands personal knowledge of an extremely relational and intervening God.

### A Sovereign God, An Involved God

Without equivocation, our preachers portray a powerful and sovereign God in their sermons. The Divine is removed and separate from humanity in righteousness, goodness, and in the capacity to act. However, within this portrait of an all-powerful God is a split in character that narrates the Divine as immanently close and involved in the lives of humanity—especially for those who are believers.

Like most of the preachers discussed here, Barbara narrates a God who has the capacity to act, maintains absolute control, and cannot fail. In her sermon “Against All Odds” she begins with the understanding that “life as a Christian does not exclude us from trials and tribulations...scary situations.” And yet, although life does not exclude believers from these situations, they can still take comfort during them. Here is the consolation Barbara offers:

Realize beloved, **God is sovereign. He can do whatever He wants to.** Because you have **hell on your street** is not necessarily an indicator that you have done something wrong. **It could very well be that you are attempting to live a righteous life** and God has allowed this tragedy to come to make you stronger than what you thought you were. **He has allowed this mess, in your eyes, to come to cause you to have another testimony** that will reach more people for Jesus. – Barbara

She contends that God “can do whatever He wants,” and it is with this capacity that God maintains control over all circumstances—even those that equal “hell on your street.”

With this sovereign articulation of God, Barbara gives purpose to the trials her community is facing on their streets of life; God very well may not be punishing them for something they have done, but is instead cultivating strength and testimony within believers. The purpose of this strength and testimony is to help “reach more people for Jesus.” Here, God is in such control that even the bad times of life are not out of God’s reach, but instead God allows these moments in life to occur in order to accomplish a larger mission within and beyond an individual’s particular circumstance.

For Barbara, even as God does not prevent things from happening in a person’s life, God is still “a real God that can show up and show out.” God does not have constraints within His capacity to act, and performs grandiose interventions on behalf of the Children of God and/or Beloved. The Children of God are those gathered in her midst. In knowing that God cannot fail, believers must simply “declare the goodness of the Lord and watch God move on (their) behalf... God will lift up a standard against [the enemy]”:

**Just face the enemy, no need to fight him.** And that’s not all, when we face our problems. The word tells us in verse 17b **not to be afraid or discouraged because the Lord is with us.** No matter how bad it may look, God is with you. **He’s with you in the chemo treatments, He is with you in the mediation room; He is with you in the unemployment line. He is with you.** –Barbara

God is intimately involved in the lives of Barbara and her community. Just as much as God is sovereign and powerful, God is personal. Barbara removes the aloof “enemy” and “scary situation” and distinctively names them. She then declares the presence of God who has the capacity to act in the battle of “chemo treatments,” the private thoughts of

“mediation rooms,” and the instability of the “unemployment line,” and represent those who need provision. God is concerned about, present with, and intervenes on behalf of His people when they face the tangible “enemy.” This God is the same one from whom these preachers bring their immediate good news.

Patricia very poignantly narrows down the imminence, knowledge, and sovereignty of God during the celebration of her sermon “God in the Midst of the Fire.” Patricia’s God-talk is steeped in very ordinary statements that pertain to concrete experiences in life. Prior to the moment of celebration, she declares:

**No matter what, God is an on-time God.** He may not come when you want him to, but he is **always on time.** –Patricia

Correct timing mark’s God’s intervention in the lives of Patricia and her community.

When the immediate act of intervention has not occurred, God is no less present in or knowledgeable of their lives, especially during times of trial. As Patricia says, “God is in the midst of every situation that you are in.” And, in the midst of every situation:

**The Lord sees your** affliction  
The Lord sees your pain  
**The Lord knows your** heartache  
The Lord knows your suffering –Patricia

God is a personal intervening God who acts in correct timing based on supreme knowledge. With His supreme knowledge, God acts in concrete ways. Patricia ends her sermon with the affirmation that:

God is a healer  
God is a way-maker  
God is a lawyer

God is all knowing  
**Is there anything too hard for God?**

**There is nothing too big**

Nothing too small  
Nothing too wide  
Nothing too tall that he can't fix

**My God, My God!** –Patricia

God is sovereign, is all things to those who believe in whatever situation they face. God is one who heals in illness, makes a way amidst obstacles, and provides defense—all with full knowledge. Nothing is too big, unattainable, or undoable for the Divine, and His ability can be seen in everyday life matters.

These preaching women have an overall understanding of God as sovereign and all-powerful, yet willing to act on behalf of faithful believers. Interestingly, their tropes of a sovereign and engaged God are overwhelmingly male and masculine in depiction. In search of feminine ideals, the greatest interruptions to this masculine identity of God are in the women's use of familiar experience, in which they engage female protagonists with care and bring women's experiences into their sermons (i.e. Teresa's depiction of child birth as power, and Barbara's celebration with fellow sisters of the faith at the great banquet table discussed in Chapter II). In this regard, the preachers' articulations about the person of God are not encapsulated in inclusive language, but their experience as women of faith no less shapes their understanding that the feminine is a part of and belongs in talk about God, faith, and life. Ultimately, this masculine and sovereign God is not outside of their abilities to articulate and understand as women who proclaim the good news and make it plain for those who are listening.

Relational (Conversion, Redemption, Reconciliation)

Our preachers give great attention to vertical reconciliation and relational language. This vertical emphasis means that they focus most of their reconciliation

speech on the relationship between God and humanity, as opposed to the reconciliation of human beings to one another. However, their sermons still convey ideas about the struggle for mutuality and equality within day-to-day relationships between individuals.

### **Vertical Relationships: Human-to-Divine**

When these preaching women focus on reconciliation within the human and Divine relationship, personal knowledge of God through Jesus is the means of conversion and wholeness. Along with the process of maintaining a relationship with the Divine through “working out your soul’s salvation” or sanctification, an individual’s acceptance of this personal knowledge (referred to as salvation or “being saved”) are the means by which she can be assured of and depend on the action of a sovereign-involved God in daily life matters.

Teresa maintains a close relationship between personal salvation and God’s involvement in the daily concerns of the community. In her sermon “Seasons,” which discusses the challenges of life changes and individual discernment, she connects salvation, righteous living, and repentance. Teresa characterizes seasons as the moments “when time and purpose meet,” whether this creates a favorable or unfavorable circumstance in the lives of believers. She calls her listeners to the challenge of using discernment in order to “recognize, accept, or change” their seasons of life. For Teresa, “when we accept Christ as our savior, we have a change in season and have a turnaround in our life.” Through “maintaining focus on Christ” there is “a knowing placed in our spiritual DNA that causes us to know when it’s time to do a certain thing.” Teresa explains that rightly discerning is predicated on one’s “accepting Jesus’ sacrifice,” specifically his death on the cross. However, if an individual has missed her season, not

properly discerned, or taken her eyes off Jesus by “holding on to the old,” God is waiting to intervene and set her back on course if she repents and confesses her sin, because “He is faithful to forgive our sins.”

Teresa maintains the connection between personal salvation and God’s involvement in life in her sermons “When Waiting Gets Tough” and “From Pain to Power.” In “When Waiting Gets Tough” she states:

God wants us to remember **our salvation and direction is in Him** and comes from Him.

God is the one who gives both personal salvation and direction. Similarly, in “Pain to Power” she says:

“When we **give ourselves into the hands of God**, He will **give us direction.**”  
–Teresa

Overall, navigating daily life decisions and circumstances is linked to the vitality of an individual’s relationship with God, which is mediated by their acceptance of Jesus’ death on the cross as a sacrifice that holds personal meaning. As long as individuals are in an ongoing process of repentance and reconciliation with God, they can depend on His remaining active in their lives in very concrete ways. Teresa most often communicates God’s concrete activity by giving individuals “revelation, an assignment or purpose, and direction.”

Louise asserts that individuals have access to God through Christ. An individual’s access to God informs her daily life circumstances, primarily through God’s preferential treatment of those who are believers. While encouraging those listening not to “faint on the journey” Louise exhorts:

**Church we have access...Through Christ we have access**—right of entry, admission, entrée, admittance, our right **to use this unmerited favor in our lives.**  
–Louise

Individuals can rely on Divine preference in their lives; however, they have not earned or deserved such “favor.” On the contrary, Christ has afforded Christians access to God through unconditional love and grace. Although access to God by way of salvation is free, believers must “participate” in their “acceptance of Jesus.” Human beings must work out their salvation:

What does it mean for us to have **peace with God**? As people of faith, and more particularly, as Methodist we believe that **salvation comes by faith through the grace of God.** We believe that first we must come to **recognize that we need to come to believe in Jesus Christ.** This is a process that can happen instantaneously, or it can be a process. But I want to remind those who have not **accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior** that because you are created in the very image of God, the Imago Dei, you are under the protective guardianship of Jesus Christ through his offer of Prevenient Grace. It is **because of God’s unconditional love that has been poured out through grace** that this grace is extended to you. **However, we have to participate in our acceptance of Jesus Christ. We are justified when we make confession that we believe in Jesus Christ.** More than **2000 years ago Jesus went ahead of us to offer the salvific power of his love, through dying on the cross at Calvary for your sins and mine....** – Louise

In her sermons, Louise asserts that, through death on the cross, Jesus offered “the salvific power of his love,” which resulted in humanity’s ability to have “peace with God.” However, individuals have a responsibility to exercise their agency in making a choice and accepting Christ as their “personal savior.” This choice is the beginning of an individual’s working out salvation. If individuals both “recognize” and “accept” that Jesus has made an offering on their behalf, they are promised peace with God and certainty in life with God. In Louise’s articulation of salvation, sin is clearly personal; it is “your sin and mine.” She does not name what that sin is; nevertheless, she makes it apparent that this sin caused a breach in humanity’s relationship with God.

Louise's final affirmation to those gathered, that "life will not be easy, but the Lord is going to make a way for you," has its foundation in an understanding that reconciliation in one's personal relationship with God, through the "acceptance of Jesus," influences life here and now. The most promising influence in the here and now is God's direct activity in the lives of believers. Therefore, by God's preference for believers "we win if we do not faint on the journey." The "God who neither faints nor grows weary" will eventually give believers triumph in their lives because of their relationship with Him.

For these preachers, personal relationship with God through Christ is of real importance when calculating the certainty of God activity in everyday life matters. The women do not consider reconciliation or God activity outside of the personal stability of the human and Divine relationship. The stability of that relationship is predicated on an individual's acceptance of Jesus as mediator and savior. God acts on behalf of those with whom He is in relationship. God has personal significance, first and foremost, and some of the preachers extend this personal significance to attend to the day-to-day matters of human relationships.

### **Horizontal Relationships: Human-to-Human**

Sharon and Valerie employ the most developed theological language in order to talk about reconciliation within human-to-human relationships, and both employ reoccurring themes across multiple sermons. These preachers explicitly link the concern for human relations to humanity's relationship with God.

For Sharon, God makes a way for wholeness in the human-to-Divine relationship via the work, death, and primarily the ascension of Christ. In her sermon “Why We Can’t Wait,” she states:

But what **this ascension tells us** is that in Christ...**the infinite has embraced the finite. At the very heart of the Trinity now is a human being, Jesus...**so that we do not wait heaven with a bare hope, but in our Head, Jesus, we already possess it. –Sharon

The human Jesus and the ascended Christ are the means by which Sharon and her community are currently reconciled with God. However, they have the task of “daily sanctification through the help of the Holy Spirit to become more like Christ.” As they are “drawn into the family of God” and “profess the faith of being Children of God,” they are “mandated to be people of action.” In her sermon “Well of Grace,” Sharon admonishes that “we must find ways to join the reconciling work of Jesus” even in the extension of Grace. Therefore, the woman of John’s Gospel who is caught in the act of adultery, “is the story of many women—bowed down and hiding because of shame, feeling ugly and unworthy to accomplish God’s dreams or any dreams.” In extending the work of reconciliation and God’s grace, she calls “the church to allow the renewing work of God to flow into the lives of others.” This renewing works entails serving the Lord in very concrete ways by serving others even when it does not “look right” to onlookers, such as “opening the door” and accepting the “nine year-old pregnant girl.”

Sharon communicates a very personal knowledge of separation from God due to sin, and an extremely personal gratitude and awe over reconciliation with God through Christ. Her personal understanding of salvation and redemption impact her immediate fate and relationship with God; these are the same sentiments that the other women express in their focus on human-to-Divine reconciliation. There is little differentiation

between Sharon's expressed God-talk on a personal level and that of the other preachers. How the preacher's personal God-talk influences ideas of mission is where the largest differences reside between the preachers. For Sharon, the experience of reconciliation with God does not emphasize conversion for the sake of being made "right" or "righteous"; instead, reconciliation entails an encounter between sin and the sympathetic and accepting grace of a faithful God. Therefore, she engages missional themes around extending a sympathetic and accepting grace to others, as opposed to converting or evangelizing them for the sake of being "made right with God."

Valerie, on the other hand, places emphasis on God-talk that addresses human-to-human relationships with a different end than Sharon's. Valerie relies on ties of kinship and family grounded in God while focusing on matters of social justice. In her sermon entitled "Where's My Daddy," which concerns the status of fatherhood in African American communities and the influence of a discriminatory prison system on missing fathers, she states:

**We must proclaim** within our community, and beyond its borders, to all of those who understand **the Divine kinship of humankind**, that **the oppressed must go free—now.** —Valerie

For Valerie, there is a Divine link between human beings that is discernible by some, and supports the freedom of those who are oppressed. Her charge to the gathered community is that, because of this Divine kinship, they have a responsibility to proclaim that "the oppressed must go free." Valerie is advocating for a conversion of human relationships. This conversion is literal and tangible: it corrects the discriminatory and false imprisonment that separates African American men and children.

Valerie continues her theme of conversion and reconciliation in human relationship in her sermon “To do Justice.” She states:

**God’s social ideal is a compassionate community in which all persons are equally valued as fellow image bearers –Valerie**

Wholeness in human relationships is synonymous with equality in human relationships, founded in a theological understanding of humanity’s connectedness as God’s creation and image bearers. For Valerie, “love of God” is inextricably linked “with love for others” in tangible ways.

As she emphasizes social justice, she equally emphasizes a personal knowledge of Jesus, which most closely aligns with understandings of salvation and conversion via a faith confession. In Valerie’s sermon “He Wants it All,” evangelism and social justice are intertwined. She challenges those gathered to give their all to God through sacrifice in service to others; in essence, “doing without” in order to give to someone else. However, these sacrificial offerings and deeds that have great implications for righting social and economic injustices hold at their end the opportunity to “win someone to Christ”:

...once we are gone we will be like the women who went to the tomb—it will be too late to do it. **The one thing that we will never be able to do in Heaven is to win someone to Christ.** I believe we must do what we can, the best we can, all that we can, and when we can. –Valerie

The personal knowledge of Christ and God are of real importance to Valerie. This personal knowledge has been influential in the lives of she and her listeners; it is the precipitant of their love and actions as they seek wholeness in human relationships. Ultimately, Valerie is communicating that others should experience this personal knowledge through their own conversion experiences as they come to know Christ. Social justice and the reconciliation of human relationships are tangible missions because

they hold the potential for human beings to experience conversion in God and belonging in “Heaven.”

Although not all of our preachers explicitly engage human-to-human relationships as dominant themes within their sermons, it cannot be said that they are unaware of the need for reconciliation in human relationships. Their awareness of injustices and human relational brokenness is evident in the collective memory they draw upon when using familiar experience, as discussed in Chapter II. As opposed to arguing that these preachers are oblivious to broken human relationships, it seems more plausible that the emphasis on the human and Divine relationship is a bi-product of speech that relies on the in-breaking of God in the daily lives of believers. An individual whose hope relies on an intervening act of God gives exhortation that delineates the intervening action of God in her daily life struggles. This intervening act is predicated on an exchange within the human-Divine relationship. In this regard, the preachers are articulating a God-talk that is highly, if not immediately, applicable to the daily financial, relational, and faith struggles of she and her listeners.

As these preaching women express different theological understandings of reconciliation, they overwhelmingly emphasize a personal knowledge of what reconciliation with God is and means as the point from which their God-talk pivots. God cannot be considered outside of an intimate or personal knowledge and understanding of the Divine in an individual’s immediate life. Personal knowledge is most often based within the portrait of the life, work, death, and ascension of Jesus; and Jesus’ narrative holds real importance when accessing the vitality of life with God. In this regard, the women do not generally preach about missions, evangelism, social justice, or everyday

matters of faithful living without first focusing upward. Just as the women focus upward as it relates to reconciliation, they focus upward as it relates to receiving help along the journey of faithful living.

### Self-Reliant and God-Reliant

Preachers sometimes have “helpers” to assist them and their listeners in obtaining or achieving a challenge or goal. These challenges can include righteous living, waiting on the Lord to intervene, or assisting the needs of others. The significance of these women’s helpers is that they are predominantly spiritual and intangible in nature, as opposed to presently living human beings. I use this term because our preachers rely heavily on Jesus as a friend and helper, and in their referents they are not referring to him as a more mystical Christ, but as a human being and/or the personification of an ascended Savior. In contrast to using spiritual entities or individuals outside of the listeners as helpers, the women use language that insinuates that the actual person or listener is their own helper as they employ certain personal actions such as prayer, fasting, and discipline. In this regard, the listeners help themselves obtain the articulated goal.

Our preachers often narrate God as a faithful helper in very imminent ways. For instance, God can literally be a way-maker who will help along the journey of life and faith through means of deliverance and rescue. In her sermon, “Are You Your Brother’s Keeper?” Patricia’s main idea is that human beings should protect and look out for one another; she proclaims, “serving God means you can’t help but serve others.” Interesting enough, as she exhorts her listeners to serve God by serving others, Patricia warns that the only reliable help comes from God:

**You need to be careful who you share your visions and revelations to [with].**

People don't always see it as a blessing, some see it as you having something special from God. **People are not always happy for you....**

**People will strip you** and try to break you down. **But God is your provider, God will make ways out of no way, God can deliver you from anything.** –Patricia

Patricia places God's power and sovereignty right alongside His faithfulness by contrasting the actions of God with the unfaithful actions of people. Although people will forsake others by taking from them and breaking them down, God will give provision and deliverance by making "ways out of no way." God is always faithful; however, people are not and cannot be trusted.

As helpers, God and the person of Jesus are interchangeable. In her sermon, "God in the Midst of the Fire," Patricia again places God and people in juxtaposition to one another:

**People give you assistance, but only God can give you Help.**

Jesus is the source of my Joy – He is the one when I feel like I can't make it another step – **He comes right on in and gives me a push.**

He is the one that protects me – when I am driving and a car turns right in front me, **he slows my car down, not to hit that person.** –Patricia

He is **the one that multiplies my money** (even though I haven't worked in two years). He multiplies it that I can pay the same bills I was paying when I had a job making 35,000 more than what I am making now. –Patricia

Patricia paints the "assistance" of people as merely temporary aid, but the "help" of God is ultimate relief because it alleviates the burden as opposed to sharing it (as does the assistance of people). When the weariness of life sets in, Patricia narrates Jesus, not as walking alongside her holding her hand, but as literally pushing or propelling her forward, outside of her own efforts. It is he who provides protection even in the mundane aspects of life, like preventing car accidents and multiplying money. She contends that Jesus is "the ONLY one who can save you and bring you out of a pit of hell and

destruction.” For Patricia, support is not found in people; both support and relief are found in Jesus.

Indeed, Jesus is held up as a constant support and friend in the sermons. Barbara calls him the “advocate fighting for us” during trials and tribulations, as individuals try to remain faithful and weather their storms. For her, relief and advocacy do not come from other individuals—they come from Jesus. He is the one who helps, and his help is an ongoing activity. Louise speaks of this as she calls her congregation to “change and come over to the Lord’s side” by finding and pursuing the “Bourne Identity,” which each individual “was born into this world with.” Jesus is the one who helps individuals in their change and pursuit of this:

Jesus is the one whom we have called Messiah. **Jesus has come to live among us.** Jesus walked in the midst of the people, he healed some, fed others, unstopped deaf ears and open blinded eyes. **The Jesus whom we have been reading about in the Law, has come to live in our midst.** He is the one that we crucified on a cross and he is the one who has been raised. **Because he got up, the world can get up. Yes, we can have our lives back.** –Louise

For Louise, Jesus is the one who came to live in our midst and was crucified. However, in resurrection, he continues “to live among us.” The ongoing life of Jesus in our midst through resurrection is what allows people to have their lives back, and Louise offers her listeners no other outside assistance. He is the reason for the possibility of life and the present assistance in their midst for obtaining that life.

As are God and Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, or Spirit is also a persona of help often present in these preacher’s sermons. In her sermon “A Stolen Moment,” Sharon challenges her listeners to seek and seize the opportunity “to declare what you believe...when your back is against the wall.” Her premise is that as the thief crucified

with Jesus stole the moment to declare his belief in Jesus and ask “remember me when you come into your Kingdom,” believers should do the same:

...in a moment in time, **what will we say when our backs are against the wall?**  
When we face the loss of careers with good benefits, assisted living and nursing home facilities, become victims of violence, of greed, of addictions, prisoners in ghettos, in old age, in sexism, people with broken bodies, and with broken lives,  
**what will we say?** –Sharon

For Sharon, believers are to make declaration of their belief during times of great risk and tragedy, which are the crucifixions of present day. Others include job loss, violence, the abuse of the elderly, greed, and sexism. During these risky circumstances, individuals may be overwhelmed with fear; however, in these circumstances, seeking out others who are not ashamed to declare their belief, along with the support of others who believe, is the means of courage needed to sustain what one believes. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps individuals declare belief in the “redemption purchased by Christ”:

**it is the Holy Spirit at work in our lives testifying** and applying to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us ...  
**It is the Spirit of God that speaks to our hearts** saying DO YOU NOT FEAR GOD? –Sharon

The Holy Spirit not only testifies in the lives of believers, but is the source of their ability to declare. The Spirit speaks to hearts, giving individuals strength to testify about belief in God. The Holy Spirit asks “DO YOU NOT FEAR GOD?”, which indicates that to fear God is greater than the fear of risk in declaration. The courage to declare what an individual believes comes from their fear of God and the help of the Spirit testifying in their lives.

If God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit is not named among those who give assistance, the women most often name “self” as the source of help. For instance, in Valerie’s

sermon, “He Wants it All,” an individual’s knowing God and her devotion to God is assisted by her spending time with Him:

**Beloved, you will not worship what or who you do not know! And we will never know God’s will for our lives until we spend that time with Him, too. We need to take regular and frequent time with Jesus so we can let our hearts be sensitive to His love for us. –Valerie**

As mentioned above, Valerie advocates for missions via humans helping others as a form of promoting knowledge of God. However, here in the sermon in which her focus is an intimate knowledge of God, she emphasizes an individual’s self-practices as the means through which they are assisted in both obtaining knowledge about God and being devoted to Him. Individuals come into knowledge of God through self-efforts of spending regular and frequent time with Jesus. Listeners are the agents of their own help as they seek to know more about God.

This self-reliance may seem feasible when it comes to matters of personal piety; however, when preachers engage themes of finding or maintaining strength during times of adversity, the struggle and desperation of the “self” remains the viable form of help. Teresa explains to those gathered the process of moving “From Pain to Power.” She explains that in life there are times in which individuals will find themselves “in painful situations not knowing what to do.” In these situations, individuals hope for clarity, direction, and spiritual maturity, which will help them “take authority over whatever situation is in front” of them. Prayer is the means of moving from being the victim of a painful situation to having a stronger position in facing a painful situation. Teresa declares that “power comes from pain.” However, the arrival of that power is up to the believer herself to facilitate. Teresa likens self-volition in the process to birthing process pangs. According to her:

**It is like the birthing process, a woman travailing until she delivers...**

– Teresa

Just as a woman's ability to push and travail is the main precipitant in her birthing a child, so too is the believer's ability to pray and seek God the main precipitant in having the ability to face and live through painful situations. In the birthing room, the assistance of doctors is secondary to the woman and child; however, in the birthing room of life others are secondary to self and God.

### **God-Talk: Talking-Back to "Structuring Structures"**

Ideas about theological motifs *within* preaching, which are distinct from theological understandings *about* preaching, are underdeveloped within homiletics literature. Because of this, there is little in homiletical literature with which to compare the theological content of these sermons. In their sermons, these preaching women most readily pick up the relational themes of the broader tradition of women's preaching and the daily struggles of faithful living with belief in a sovereign God from the broad tradition of Black preaching. Unlike the focus in the literature on women's preaching traditions on human-to-human relationships and the transformation thereof, our preachers engage the relational thematic most directly as it relates to the human and Divine relationship. The most striking features of their God-talk are its ultimate emphases on personal and intimate knowledge of God, and its reliance on self and God as it relates to assistance in matters of faith and life. The history and experience of being an outsider-within facilitates and requires a reliance on self and God, while it also influences ideas of reconciliation and wholeness that are upwardly focused human-to-Divine relationships as opposed to outwardly focused human-to-human relationships. If relief or help cannot be

relied upon or promised by natural means of the human realm, then an emphasis on the supernatural is required if one is to still believe help is possible. At the end of matters, a sovereign and powerful God who willingly intervenes provides that help.

### Sovereign and Involved

The “sociocultural context of marginalization and struggle” of African Americans influences the theological articulations within Black preaching. Cleophus J. LaRue argues that the social experience and struggle of African Americans has required an “enunciation of a God and a gospel” that speaks in “meaningful, practical, and concrete” ways.<sup>206</sup> Part of this meaningful, practical, and concrete approach is directly related to survival.<sup>207</sup> Mitchell relates that the Black sermon and preaching are heavily steeped in a people’s wondering about their own ability to survive and their ability to “hold on until they receive some relief from their situation.”<sup>208</sup> With this in mind, “hope” has become the center of God-talk in Black preaching.<sup>209</sup> Hope is inspired by the motif of a providential God who stands on the side of the oppressed, and who is concerned about a people’s everyday affairs in “very concrete and practical ways.”<sup>210</sup> The greatest hope is located within a God who will intervene for the people who are “holding on,” and who will intervene for them in powerful ways.

With these powerful actions in mind, LaRue describes Black preaching as attending strongly to theological motifs that demonstrate the “gracious and mighty acts”

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<sup>206</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 19.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, 67-68.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 130-31.

<sup>210</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 3.

that God has done on behalf of God's people.<sup>211</sup> Within this framework of a sovereign and acting God, concrete experience is unequivocally linked to God-talk. Concrete experiences also lead to theological formulations.<sup>212</sup> LaRue names five domains of these experiences: personal piety, care of the soul, social justice, corporate concerns, and maintenance of the institutional church.<sup>213</sup> These experiences are the "avenues" through which preachers try to "connect God's power to concrete" situations.<sup>214</sup>

Our preachers' articulation of a sovereign and involved God is the prevailing image within their God-talk. They tend to retain the theological motifs found within Black preaching literature, which emphasize a providential or sovereign God who acts on behalf of His people. As this sovereign and involved God is a prevailing image in their God-talk, they use this trope to engage the daily life experiences of missions and evangelism, the struggles to live faithfully as a believer who awaits God, and the individual search for identity and purpose. If the sovereign and involved God is the dominant image within the preachers' God-talk, then maintaining a relationship with God is, quite naturally, the central point from which their God-talk moves inward and outward.

#### Relational

The greatest affinity these preaching women have with theological articulations about women's traditions of preaching is in the relational aspects of reconciliation. As discussed in Chapter III, themes of subversion are at the center of discussions about

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 21-25.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 25.

women's preaching as it relates to concepts of familiar experience. Continuing this trajectory into God-talk, subversion's visionary ends are justice and wholeness found within a relationship with an egalitarian God. Eunjoo Mary Kim describes preaching from a woman's perspective as seeking to re-present and re-create the "wholeness of God" to the community gathered. Within these conceptualizations, sin is readily envisioned as the injustices precipitated by the hegemonic power structures within patriarchy. Therefore, the trajectory of "forgiveness, reconciliation, freedom, and new life"<sup>215</sup> is concretized in women's preaching that engages matters of justice, inclusive language, imagery of God, and authority in preaching for the purpose of including those on the margins.<sup>216</sup> For example, Christine Smith names injustice in the form of sexism as sin; therefore, her descriptive of a feminist homiletic seeks a corrective vision through addressing the language of the tradition and Scripture as it intersects with feminine experiences.<sup>217</sup> In a different yet similar trajectory, Mary Turner and Mary Lin Hudson posit that women's finding voice in preaching is fundamentally a theological issue, because God is the creator and giver of voice.<sup>218</sup> Therefore, when women equally participate in the act of preaching from a marginalized and silenced social location, we move towards the wholeness of God.

Within their sermons, these preaching women preach themes of conversion, redemption and reconciliation that promote an understanding of fulfillment and

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<sup>215</sup> Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice through the Ages*, 21.

<sup>216</sup> See *ibid*; Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*; Hudson and Turner, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*; Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*.

<sup>217</sup> See Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*; and "Sexism" in *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*.

<sup>218</sup> Hudson and Turner, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*.

wholeness in God's vision. However, most often they emphasize wholeness and reconciliation as it relates to the relationship between humanity and God, as opposed to its outward implications on human-to-human relationships. This is a significant way in which these preachers part ways with present discussions of God-talk within women's preaching literature. Our preachers' emphases on a personal knowledge of God are critical in order for any individual to be certain of the intervening activity of God in her life. This personal knowledge of God is based on an individual's knowledge that the life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is the means through which sermon listeners are reconciled with God, their personal sin is forgiven, and they become capable of being in harmonious relationships with God. There is purposeful value in the full narrative of Jesus, and this value is personally significant in that it makes room for right relationships with God. Believing in this narrative is where these preachers locate closeness to God, closeness to the intervening power of God, and identity.

Some feminist theologians have taken to task narratives that place value in suffering with intent to make it good and purposeful, such as that of Jesus' crucifixion. Thus, there is an emphasis on corporate sin and reconciliation versus personal sin and reconciliation, and varied opinions about where to locate the significance of Jesus' life and ministry. Womanists in particular have pushed back on a faith narrative that emphasizes the bodily suffering of an individual to be, like Jesus' suffering, purposefully redeeming—in as far as this purposefulness is associated with the idea of suffering being necessary for the living bodies of individuals. This tension with purposeful suffering is of real importance when the narrative of Jesus' bodily suffering can be held parallel to the suffering of Black bodies throughout history via the crucifixion of chattel slavery and its

subsequent wounding. M. Shawn Copeland argues that suffering is redemptive only as far as it is remembered and produces discomfort and outrage, which continue the movement towards emancipation.<sup>219</sup> And yet, although there is tension with retaining redemptive suffering motifs, these motifs are significant to traditional Black church faith. They are tied to the slave church's locating Christ's physical solidarity with slaves in his crucifixion and resurrection, even though the resurrection ultimately offered victory and life as the final words over suffering and death. In *The Black Christ*, Kelly Brown Douglas proposes the need for openness within theological narratives that allows for both the traditional Christ narrative as well as the one that reflects contemporary demands.<sup>220</sup> In this, crucifixion and resurrection should be retained as a significant part of theological discourse within discussions of Black theologies.<sup>221</sup>

The preachers themselves open up avenues for further explorations of God-talk that incorporate the personal and the communal. If hope in the midst of daily struggle is the major impetus for the overwhelming image of a personally sovereign God, then reconciliation with God must first be personal before it can be corporate. This is evidenced within Sharon's and Valerie's sermons when they extend a personal knowledge of humanity's relationship to God externally to the purposes of working towards reconciliation in human-to-human relationships. In general, these preaching women are aware of the presence of corporate conversion as demonstrated through their engagement with communal memory in Chapter III. However, personal knowledge of a saving and intervening God is the way in which they confront and deal with the daily

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<sup>219</sup> Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, 124-25.

<sup>220</sup> Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 107-09.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

iterations of that sin in their daily life struggles of living with faith. Personal knowledge that suffering will not have the last word, as evidenced by Jesus' resurrection, is the means through which the women intonate hope in the midst of unemployment lines, affliction, and the despair of waiting.

### Present Help

Our preachers imply a suspicion of others and a reliance on God and self in many of their sermons. This becomes evident in the way they articulate assistance in matters of life and faith. Their articulation of helpers in a very spiritual manner almost exclusively formulates a self-reliant and God-reliant theology, with little attention to the presence or expectation of help from fellow humanity. For these preachers, the personal intervening God is also a God who helps. In fact, God is the most reliable help in daily faith and life struggles outside of self. This self and spirit reliance is a bi-product of theological understandings steeped in the lived experiences of individuals who have few humanly tangible helpers present. If an individual is marginalized and isolated, she cannot rely upon or guarantee that other human beings will be her helpers. This self- and Spirit-reliant theology in the women's sermons makes sense if we consider the socio-cultural history of African American women as both Black and woman; where, in the absence of excessive human alliances, they have had to depend on the intangible for help, assistance, and rescue.

These preachers' existences as Black and woman almost require supernatural helpers for a theology that is useful, inspiring, and inciting. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes explains a Spirit theology as the impetus for the preaching of African American women

in history.<sup>222</sup> This Spirit theology is grounded in the normative and accepted understanding of the Holy Spirit and power of the Spirit within some African American faith communities. Historically, within these faith communities there has been an interdependence between the community and the Spirit. The result is that some African Americans do not consider the Spirit as a “later appendage” to the Father and Son, but as a robust and active persona. Gilkes explains that African American women, in their majority membership within African American faith communities and their choices of Christian practices, can be considered “agents and advocates for the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost.” In this vein, our preachers’ sermons display a history of interdependence between a community and God in a language that has much to do with the abilities of self and God. However, they also promote these preaching women’s belief in the reliability of help from God, whether this help comes in the form of Jesus, God, or Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

These preaching women associate the truth they speak with the immediate lives of their listeners who are in relationship with a powerful, sovereign, and intervening God. As individuals on assignment with a God-message for their listeners, their language is most often authoritative and active as they offer a word that “breaks into” the gathered community. In this regard, truth emerges from these sermons as something that is immediate and personally relevant. Similarly, the personal is at the center of these women’s theological articulations. Considering the social history of African American

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<sup>222</sup> Alton B. Pollard and L. H. Welchel, *How Long This Road: Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 131-40.

women, the centrality of personal relationships and personal knowledge in their theological discourse seems directly related to being reliant on God and self.

## CHAPTER V

### CHORDS AND HARMONY: PREACHING AS CREATIVE INGENUITY

“...each single gain feeds into the gain of the body collective.”<sup>223</sup>

#### **Introduction**

The wisdom found within our preachers’ sermons expands our knowledge of what might be “caught and taught” by those learning to preach. These preaching women add an additional dimension to conversations that consider the nature of preaching as having both shared and yet *distinctive* aspects grounded in identity and context. Our preachers and their sermons are of real significance for those who may identify with this group of preaching women, and for any preacher as she or he continues to develop creative ingenuity in preaching.

As we have seen, our preachers’ overall approach to sermons rests, at minimum, at the intersection of the ways in which Black experiences and women’s experiences are influential in sermon design and content. At times, their identifications with the Black feminine gender interrupt masculine preference in Black preaching traditions. At other times, their ethnic and cultural identification interrupts the threat of developing monolithic ideas about how the feminine interacts and is engaged in women’s preaching

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<sup>223</sup> Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 224.

traditions. As our preachers craft sermons, there is a way in which they simultaneously continue the tradition and use the tradition along with their own experiences to make something texturally different from the same tradition.

From the information that follows, I extract a set of key lessons from our preachers' approaches to sermons in order to demonstrate how other preachers might develop similar ideas and habits that work within their preaching ministries. Each section briefly reviews what these preaching women do in their use of familiar experience, engagement with Scripture, conveying truth, and God-talk, based on the exposure to and immersion in their sermons engaged in Chapters III and IV. Each specific element will be correlated with similar ideas in current homiletical literature, and then used to promote ideas and practices for sermon development.

At the end of each section, I suggest several "in practice" pedagogical practices. The suggested exercises do not replace firsthand engagement with various approaches to preaching as a means of learning preaching. Rather, these are supplemental exercises which are to be used in conjunction with firsthand exposure to preaching in order to foster creative ingenuity. They could be used either in sermon development or for sermon analysis and review. As a tool for sermon development, the process would be followed as written. For sermon analysis and review, the same steps would be used, but used in a more direct way to identify elements within the preacher's own sermons or the sermons of others.

## Using Familiar Experience

Our preachers demonstrate a deep knowledge of their communities while engaging the tradition of the gathered community in their sermons. This knowledge and tradition becomes the point from which they pivot within their sermons and connect with the daily life world of their listeners. These preaching women rely heavily on their knowledge of communal language and memory, the existence of mutual experiences between listeners, and authoritative voices within the community. At times, as they use familiar experience in conjunction with the community's tradition, they bring marginal experiences into normative tropes of that which is familiar and recognizable to listeners. This use of the familiar is personal and communal at its core, providing multiple opportunities for listeners to make points of connection with Scripture, the message, and God-talk.

## Learning Familiar Experience

In order to use familiar experience in this manner, the preacher must first of all directly engage her knowledge of the gathered community and human experience. This engagement includes exploring communal language and memory through the shared narratives, joys, and struggles of the community, or *finding communal sacred stories*. Second, the preacher must learn to call forth the values, assumptions, and authority located within the voiced of the community, which I refer to as *recovering the voiced*. As we will see, stories and voices are a part of a community's tradition, and they are often the vehicles of that tradition. Third, for the preacher seeking to continue tradition in transformed ways, preachers must learn to place their own experiences and the experiences of others alongside dominant communal language and memory. This has the

potential to interrupt and/or expand the shape and content of that which is recognizable and familiar within the community, otherwise known as *using the familiar to transform the familiar*. Lastly, preachers must learn to gather up the daily struggles and joys of human experience, both personal and corporate, in a way that creates shared ways of knowing in the midst of a gathered community, or *creating mutual experience*. Creating mutual experience and conveying-truth are nearly inseparable. For this reason, I will not treat this method of using familiar experience in the following section. Instead, I will engage the process of creating mutual experience in the section below entitled “Learning to Convey Truth.” *Communal sacred stories, recovering the voiced, using the familiar to transform the familiar, and creating mutual experiences* all create opportunities for a community to experience the authority and significance of the gospel in its immediate context.

### **Finding the Community’s Sacred Stories**

These preachers rely heavily on listeners’ abilities to identify and connect with sermon content. One means through which they accomplish this connection is by drawing upon their own knowledge of the community’s sacred story(ies). Sacred stories are narratives deemed valuable within in a specific community, based on their repetition and force of meaning within that community (i.e. these preaching women’s use of the various iterations of the narrative of “living while Black”). As our preachers utilized sacred stories, they called forth the language and memory that belonged to the community in which they preached. The use of sacred stories creates a mutual point of identification

during the sermon<sup>224</sup> between both the preacher and listeners, and amongst the listeners themselves. In addition to identification, the use of sacred stories deploys the language and memory most familiar to the community for the construction of meaning in that context. In other words, a preacher is able to construct meaning and facilitate connections with her message through speaking “the language of the folk,” thus reducing possible obstacles in a listener’s apprehending a message’s significance and authority.

In preaching, we seek to minimize the potential obstacles that inhibit the message’s communication<sup>225</sup> which includes obstacles created through language and symbols that are distant from the language and symbols of a community. Lenora Tubbs Tisdale writes about preaching as an act of engaging local theology and folklore, in that the preacher must take the time to know and understand the community in which she preaches.<sup>226</sup> Preaching itself is an act of folklore in so far as its language, symbols, illustrations, and form remain close to the “ground of the people.”<sup>227</sup> Specifically, Tisdale compares preaching to circle folk dancing.<sup>228</sup> The preacher’s use of the folk’s language encourages listeners to meet the preacher and participate/dance with him in the event of sermon: the circle folk dance. To an extent, preaching is cross-cultural communication;

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<sup>224</sup> Kenneth Burke's Identification Theory describes the roles of symbols in persuasion and communication based on the proclivity of individuals to identify with symbols. The act of persuasion and communication through the use of identification is "a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols." Through the process of recognition and identification, cooperation is forged between the speaker, the listener, and the idea.

<sup>225</sup> Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 34.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., xiii, 43, 126.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., xiii, 124-25.

varying cultures are present amongst listeners as well as between listeners and the preacher.<sup>229</sup>

Through her use of the everyday life world of the congregation, the preacher minimizes potential obstacles inherently present within preaching as a cross-cultural act, while forging something that is local and specific. As the preacher becomes more proficient in exegeting the culture of the congregation, she gains access to the local knowledge of the community. Tisdale suggests that preachers can access this knowledge through congregational stories and interviews, archival collections, demographics, architecture and visual arts, rituals, events and activities, and people counted as influential and/or having wisdom.<sup>230</sup> As the preacher then becomes proficient in her utilization of that knowledge for preaching, preaching becomes something of a “local theology” for a “very particular” group of people in a “very particular” time and space.<sup>231</sup> This form of preaching creates a common language between preacher and listeners as well as amongst listeners themselves: it is “hearer oriented” and proclaims something “to,” “out of the mist,” and “on behalf” of the local body.<sup>232</sup>

As Tisdale considers preaching as a highly contextual act of communicating the Gospel, she proposes a “con/text-to-sermon method” that keeps the context and congregation integral at every point of sermon development.<sup>233</sup> In this regard, excellent preachers are also ethnographers; they know and understand the culture of their preaching

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 64-77.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., xii, 38-39.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 41-42,45-46.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 99-121.

environment and are then able to utilize that understanding in sermon development and design. Insider knowledge becomes central in this type of preaching, as the preacher interprets the “signs and symbols” of a community<sup>234</sup> based on time spent engaging the community. To an extent, insider knowledge supports both the authority of the preacher as an insider demonstrating belonging and understanding, and the message as it is conveyed in the language and symbols of the community.

#### Finding the Community’s Sacred Stories In Practice:

1. Write down significant events and stories in the life of the community. This attention to community accounts for community in its most immediate and broadest capacities. In thinking about events and stories, consider those that have occurred in the past year, five years, ten years, etc.
2. Out of those events, consider events that have special meaning, demonstrated through the community’s retelling them over and over again. Give attention to events acknowledged as significant by many members of the community, and by a smaller fraction of the community.
3. After pinpointing these stories, consider from whose point of view the stories are told. This begins the process of thinking about various ways to deploy the narratives in preaching.

#### **Recovering the Voiced**

As an extension of knowing the culture of the community within which they preach, our preachers rely on their knowledge of those who are voiced within the community. The voiced of the community includes those acknowledged as influential, credible and/or authoritative, such as, grandmamma, saints of old, wisdom bearers, cultural prophets and poets. These preaching women rely on the words, phrases, terminology, and/or works of the voiced to provide the backing and warrant for the

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 91.

claims they are making. By making use of the idiom of these voices, a preacher opens up the opportunity for her voice to be heard and received as credible within the community. This acknowledgment and use of the voiced is of real importance for individuals who may struggle to find voice or possess a contested voice within their communities.

Significant people constitute a crucial vehicle of the culture and significant signs and symbols within a community that communicate values. As Tisdale advocates for cultural ethnography and exegesis as a primary aspect of preaching, she notes that certain people, both assuming and unassuming presences, can “symbolically personify ideals of the community.”<sup>235</sup> Such people communicate the community’s values, but they also show where the in-group and out-group boundaries exist, and can simultaneously function as cohesion, healing, and wholeness within a community.<sup>236</sup> In particular, Tisdale notes two groups of individuals being of importance: sages and those “on the margins.” The sages possess an “elusive” wisdom, often enacting or displaying the values of a congregation, sometimes functioning in influential leadership roles, and at other times providing “healing and wholeness” within the community. On the other hand, those on the margins may be those who “don’t fit in” or who are considered to be “extreme or eccentric” individuals who demonstrate the normative boundary lines of a community.<sup>237</sup> Community values are reinforced by people as well as transmitted through people.

The use of voice and speech is one way through which people transmit community values. The ability to give voice and use one’s voice is an authoritative

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

expression.<sup>238</sup> Mary Lin Hudson and Mary Donovan Turner explain: “Exercising one’s right to speak says something about the power and value of authorizing one’s own perspective.”<sup>239</sup> There is value claimed in one’s experience, reason, and reflection when an individual speaks and makes public that experience, reason, and reflection.<sup>240</sup> In other words, “Voice has value.”<sup>241</sup> Most congregations allow certain voices to speak and have formational privilege within the community, be it through the community’s response to that voice, or through the repetition of that voice. Embracing these voices communicates that the community both grants authority to those particular voices, and that certain voices are in some way recognized as authoritative reflections of the community’s values. Therefore, a tactical use of the power and authority of voice by those whose voices are marginalized (i.e. women in contested spaces, or LGBTQI individuals in heterosexist spaces) is for the preacher to use already established credible and authoritative voices in the community in order to bolster authority as she seeks to establish authority and gain a hearing of her own voice and reflections within the community.

#### Recovering the Voiced In Practice:

1. Jot down those who are considered wisdom bearers for the community (again, considering community in its most immediate and broadest capacity). When thinking of wisdom bearers and or those who have voice, consider those who are often quoted; consider important familiar figures; consider those viewed and/or acknowledged as “experts” in various areas or life-knowledge.

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<sup>238</sup> Hudson and Turner, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*, 12.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

2. List actual phrases that are often said or known within the community. Take another minute to quickly write down *who* comes to mind when you hear each phrase (i.e. who actually says this?).
3. Say these phrases and explore the idiom. Record them if you can and listen to them in your own voice.
4. Write down *what* first comes to mind thematically when you hear each phrase (hope, faith, life, uncertainty, jealousy, greed, happiness, etc.).

### **Using the Familiar to Transform the Familiar**

At times, our preachers used that which was familiar and recognizable to listeners as the means to interrupt aspects of the traditions they engaged. As the preachers are both aware of and utilize the community's sacred stories and the credible voices of the community, they also make use of their own experiences and the experiences of those on the fringes of the community, making the familiar over again as new (i.e. the use of the feminine in celebration and the use of women, children, and men in the experience of "living while Black"). By using experience in this way, the preachers introduce new or counter-traditional content along with that which is familiar to the community. In this way, the preachers explore the ways in which the already familiar may be used to expand and interrupt tradition. The community's tradition and the preacher's way of knowing then become the site of creative engagement, riffing off of the tradition to create something similar to yet different from the recognized tradition. These moments demonstrate the possibility of using established communal language and memory to transform communal beliefs and tradition.

As I discussed earlier, signs, symbols, and people are conduits of a tradition, and that which is familiar and most valued within the community. One of the larger aims in preaching, however, is to move beyond the business of reinforcing already existing

norms. The larger aim in preaching is to use the common and conventional to transform and/or forge something new within the life of the community. In this regard, the preacher has to distance herself a bit from her “insider” position with the community, and gain access to the critical edge that comes with her “outsider” more distanced relationship with the community.<sup>242</sup> The Gospel proclaimed pushes the community beyond itself and that which is familiar to the community into a greater vision. The familiar becomes the imaginative vehicles through which the Gospel then transforms the community.<sup>243</sup>

Tisdale notes Jesus’ use of parables as an exemplification of this imaginative and transforming use of the familiar:

Preaching as folk art also recognizes that congregations and their day-to-day worlds can also be fertile soil for discovering symbols capable of communicating the gospel in imaginative and transformative ways. Taking a clue from Jesus, whose theological reflection in the Gospels frequently began with some ordinary experience of everyday life (separating wheat from chaff on the threshing floor, traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, or searching for a lost coin), preaching as folk art uses ordinary local symbols to communicate extraordinary holy truths.<sup>244</sup>

The parables engaged the familiar concepts, images, world, and speech of the community, yet pushed the community’s imagination and view beyond its current place in time. In a similar manner, preaching can also expand the community’s values, limits, and imagination. This expansion is accomplished through inverting the assumed ordering of the community’s world: challenging false and problematic values within the community, while opening up “unimagined possibilities within the same community.”

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<sup>242</sup> Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 49-53.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

The key to this transformational aspect of preaching is the use of common language, experience, and world of the community as the vehicle of transformation.<sup>245</sup>

It is important to bear in mind that the preacher's ability to narrate an understanding of the tradition to listeners is of real importance if she hopes to transform a tradition. In the previous example, the preacher is able to establish her credibility as a competent preacher who knows the tradition and narrative of the community as she engages the narratives, traditions, and key voices of the community. The insider credibility she establishes by acknowledging the legitimacy of narrative and tradition simultaneously creates room for her own experiences and ways of knowing and being to interrupt and possibly transform the tradition. The ability to potentially subvert and transform the tradition "as is" is based largely on the preacher's ability to gain a listening ear by first finding common ground or points of solidarity with listeners.

Using the Familiar to Transform the Familiar In Practice:

1. Brainstorm the ways in which the easily recognizable and/or familiar is usually expressed in sermons to the community (i.e.: is the familiar usually conveyed via story, song, quotes, passing phrases, or celebration?).
2. Revisit the "in practice" section above for recovering the voiced of the community. In looking over the voiced within the community, consider alternative figures who may not be well known but who still fit the characteristics of these wisdom bearers. (For instance if Martin Luther King, Jr. is a recognized wisdom bearer marked by leadership characteristics and community mobilization, Septima Poinsette Clark may be an alternative wisdom bearer.)
3. In the same "in practice" section above, review the phrases and quotes identified as reoccurring within the community; note any problems and disagreements you experience with those phrases. If there are points of disagreement with the phrases, consider counter images or phrases to place alongside of those phrases.

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 111-21.

4. In a similar manner, re-visit the “in practice” section above in which you located the community’s sacred narratives. Consider who is usually left unattended in the story.
5. Now, think about *transformation*. Where might counter or alternative stories, images, voices, and phrases be combined with, intersect, or make new these normal means of expressing the familiar?

This process of exploring familiar experience helps the preacher gain access to her wisdom about the community in which she preaches, and access to wisdom about human experience. Actively naming and calling forth familiar experiences helps the preacher retain the information for quick accessibility when making connections between familiar experience, Scripture, conveying truth, and God-talk.

### **Engaging Scripture**

Our preachers’ engagement with Scripture is an experiential one. They have a tendency to convey an experience or create an experience for listeners as they engage Scripture. This experience is facilitated as Scripture used to make sense of everyday life, or as everyday life experiences used as a means of getting inside a passage and making sense of Scripture. Interpretive decisions, character foci, and points of connection between the text and everyday life make it clear that the Bible is *our story*. Our story is the story that makes connections with the entire community and accounts for the individual experience in community. As a means of resourcing interpretive decisions, this engagement of Scripture maintains a relationship between the realities of embodied existence and the use of Scripture in the tradition.

## Learning to Engage Scripture

Learning to engage Scripture in this manner grows out of the preacher's ability to maintain a close relationship between the everyday lives of listeners and Scripture and, in turn, minimizing the boundaries between familiar experience and Scripture. This approach includes a preacher's creating a new and/or enlivened encounter with Scripture. The first thing the preacher pursues is creating an encounter that draws the community out of its "memory" of the passage alone, making way for an immediate experience of Scripture, facilitated through points of resonance between the text and life, called *moving beyond memory to immediate encounter*. Second, activating the body while engaging the biblical text is a significant factor in facilitating this immediate encounter, or *embodying the text*. Embodiment is the way in which we engage the world around us, and sensory aspects are central to how the preacher approaches the text; including imagery, sounds, and emotions. A preacher's ability to engage Scripture as a sensory encounter creates another opportunity to minimize the boundaries between familiar experience and Scripture. Third, the preacher must become playful with the boundaries that exist between text and contemporary life. The ability to play with the fluidity between the language and content of the text and the language and experiences of today helps the preacher locate further points of connection with Scripture. This kind of play is crucial for the preacher to access her or his elusive understanding of the contemporary meaning and value of the text, or *contemporary play on/with Scripture*. Lastly, the preacher must make every attempt to experience the otherness of the text—the ways it might "push back" against our experience. In this mode, the preacher also strives to understand the text within its larger tradition of interpretation. Here, she explores some of the limits and

possibilities of Scripture within the larger community, or *tracking down the text*. A preacher is able to facilitate an experience of Scripture in as far as she engages in an experience in which neither Scripture nor experience stand alone, but function in close proximity to one another. As an individual encounters, embodies, makes play with, and tracks down a text, the imagination is continually engaged in the process of determining and conveying a message.

### **Beyond Memory to Immediate Encounter**

Our preachers of study do not rely on their listener's memory of a Scripture passage alone. They offer depth, insight and exaggeration to passages creating an experience of Scripture that is new and enlivened. Considering the central role of Scripture in their sermons, the immediate nature of their sermon's meaning is predicated by very-immediate encounters with Scripture. This immediacy seems to be designed to draw listeners out of their memory and out of the process of replaying memorized tapes about biblical passages in their minds. At the same time, this immediate encounter with the biblical text helps to focus the sermon on a present (in the room) message, while simultaneously inviting a new experience of something that could be very familiar. A preacher's imagination and imaginative engagement with the text is the crux of engaging Scripture in a way that moves beyond memory to immediate encounter.

In this way of engaging Scripture, the preacher's intent is to actively attend to the imagination. Echoing Gardner C. Taylor, LaRue notes that one of the criticisms of mainline American Protestant preaching is that it is "unimaginative."<sup>246</sup> Instead of

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<sup>246</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, 71; Gardner C. Taylor, *How Shall They Preach* (Elgin, IL: Progressive Baptist Pub. House, 1977), 60.

suppressing the imagination or using it *ad hoc* at the end of the sermon development process, LaRue advocates imaginative engagement throughout sermon development, thus saturating the entire process, including the initial engagement with Scripture.<sup>247</sup> “We see and say what lies dormant within us” through the imagination,<sup>248</sup> including the meaning and import we derive through engaging Scripture.

As a resource, the imagination must have opportunities to play freely and then make very intentional connections between various aspects of free-play. LaRue urges the preacher to allow imagination to “roam freely” in order to then organize “the free flowing thoughts” in what he calls “harnessing and harvesting the imagination.” In this process of “roaming” and “harnessing and harvesting,” we recognize that “a fertile imagination will simply not wait its turn to contribute.”<sup>249</sup> There are thoughts, ideas, images, and experiences that will compel the preacher to study Scripture, and at times meets the preacher like a “bolt of lightning” before she is able to sit at the desk and study a particular passage.<sup>250</sup> Similarly, in the process of “roaming” and “harnessing and harvesting,” the fruits of imaginative labor must be ordered and carefully arranged.

LaRue proposes organizing imaginative thoughts into three categories: *initial imaginative thoughts*, *informed imaginative thoughts*, and *enhanced imaginative thoughts*. *Initial imaginative thoughts* occur in three primary forms. They may meet us before we ever meet a passage of Scripture in serious study; rather, they emerge from our lived experience, which then leads us in search of a passage of Scripture. These thoughts

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<sup>247</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, 72.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

arise from the tradition or our memory of the passage and brief reflection on the passage. These thoughts are developed from a “fresh reading of and/or focused study of Scripture.”<sup>251</sup> Informed imaginative thoughts are those that come from our conversations and engagement with others about the content of Scripture, including reference materials and resources.<sup>252</sup> Enhanced, imaginative thoughts are the thoughts that are “never done”; they continue to happen even after the preaching moment, and have the ongoing opportunity to inform the message and sermon.<sup>253</sup>

Initial imaginative thoughts are the thoughts the preacher plays with, explores, and experiences during sermon development; particularly during an engagement with Scripture that seeks an immediate encounter. Initial thoughts are those usually associated with the “sensual, sinful, ignorance, prejudiced and preferential readings of Scripture”,<sup>254</sup> those marred by the imprint of experience, emotions, and first inclinations. LaRue proposes that these are the thoughts that “get us going” and ready for the “imaginative flight.” To some degree, the tradition of interpretation and reading from the memory of the tradition can harness these thoughts. Therefore, the preacher’s intentional focus on a “fresh reading” or immediate prolonged encounter helps move the preacher beyond memory, connecting and making room for initial imaginative thoughts. Anna Carter Florence describes this up-close and personal encounter with Scripture as “living in a text” in which a preacher attends to the text by describing and testifying to what she sees

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 76.

as she remains open and spends time with a passage of Scripture.<sup>255</sup> This engagement with Scripture is a slow and intentional process facilitated by openness to both the text and the imagination.

Beyond Memory to Immediate Encounter In Practice:

1. Read the text as if it is not familiar. Try reading the passage slowly, trying to restrain the tendency to fill in the story from memory.
2. Now, read the passage aloud, or consider having someone else read it aloud, and listen to it. If it is a narrative text, have different individuals take on the voices of different characters.
3. Jot down the first thoughts that come to your mind. Note words that are similar or evoke similar ideas, images, and/or meaning.
4. List all of the characters present (both major and minor). Describe the personal characteristics of the characters.
5. List the imagery present in the text (i.e. rocky roads, dirt roads, streams, city, fire, etc.).

At every juncture, feel free to “mark up” the text and color code similar words, images, etc. The preacher’s goal is to move beyond memory to immediate encounter; to begin an encounter with the passage which she has not previously had, to track down what stands out at a particular time, and to begin to make the sensory connections that are more fully explored in embodying the text.

### **Embodying the Text**

Our preachers of study often fill-out or fill-in the sounds, voices, and emotions evoked by Scripture, recreating or creating sensory aspects from it. In an experiential engagement of Scripture, they rely on the ability to make sensory connections between the biblical world and contemporary settings, further collapsing the boundaries between

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<sup>255</sup> Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 133-50.

the two. This sensory connection is of importance because it helps listeners connect their experiences with the Scripture and vice versa, and helps Scripture become a dynamic reality in the midst of the community as opposed to a static and received text. Embodying Scripture is one means of moving the text away from existing as an abstract and distant entity to something that possesses lively properties and possibilities, helping the preacher to make additional concrete connections between Scripture and human experience. The preacher's ability to engage the sensorium while engaging Scripture mediates the biblical text through the body, making it a text encountered by a body that will connect with the everyday experiences of bodies. Embodying the text allows for an exchange between the preacher and text in close proximity, as Scripture literally comes through and acts upon the body, engaging the senses. The preacher does not approach the text as something to be thought about, but rather as an experience to be had, as the preacher allows her full self to be engaged and acted upon by the text.

At the center of Anna Carter Florence's proposal of "living in the text" is the concept of engaging Scripture as a sensory experience. She offers the approach as an extension of a women's preaching tradition of testimony that does not seek to apprehend or arrest a text, but seeks to experience and encounter it, and then bear witness or give "testimony" to that experience.<sup>256</sup> According to Carter Florence, this is:

a different way of engaging the text, one that aims for a direct experience of the text itself... it is not *about us*; it is not *about what happened to us when we engaged the text*. It is about *what we saw and heard* in the text when we engaged it deeply; it is about the view seen from the vantage point of experience.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid. Italicized emphasis is found in the original text.

The sensory approach to Scripture limits the tendency to “think about” or “talk about” a text, which places distance between the text and preacher.<sup>258</sup> Distance limits a preacher’s experience of a text, and makes the text become an object of study. As the text becomes an “out there” object of study, the preacher is more concerned about using the right tools to unearth and excavate the true and objective meaning of a passage (i.e. including lexicons, commentaries, original language, etc.). Embodying Scripture literally removes the distance in space between Scripture and the body.

As a preacher removes the distance between her and Scripture, the process forges an experience through the preacher’s vulnerability. Carter Florence explains this type of engagement as forcing the preacher to have an experience of Scripture, while it “deeply calls the preacher to live in the text first.”<sup>259</sup> As the preacher lives in the text, she models the encounter she hopes to facilitate for listeners as she describes what she has seen and heard in her own encounter with Scripture.<sup>260</sup> Ultimately, this encounter is the message we offer and seek to describe in preaching. The greatest obstacle in this process is the preacher and the extent to which one will or will not limit the distance between the text and the self.

Embodying the Text In Practice:

1. Read aloud, listen to, or sign the passage, as applicable. Each time you go through the text, engage the text through a different part of the sensorium: touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell.
2. What else do you experience in the text by engaging your body in this way?

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

3. Read, sign, or listen to the passage a third time and pay attention to bodies: who speaks, to who is spoken, who is spoken about, and who doesn't speak at all?
4. Lastly, make notes regarding the sensorium (touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing, emotions) experienced while reading the passage.

These exercises help the preacher connect the performances within the text to the bodily performance and experience of the text. Based on her own experience, the preacher is able to begin the process of brainstorming how she might recreate this sensory experience as she helps facilitate an encounter with Scripture in the sermon.

### **Contemporary Play on/with Scripture**

In many of our preachers' sermons, the distance collapses completely between the biblical world and the daily life world. Fluidity exists in the interchange between the contemporary world and Scripture in this collapse. These preachers have the ability to locate and move the characters and experiences within Scripture in and out of the present-day world, and the ability to move individuals and experiences of the present-day world in and out of Scripture. Their experiences and knowledge of life are used as a means to demonstrate the similarities between the text and everyday life; the import of Scripture on everyday life; and, on rare occasion, the ways in which the written text cannot be a sacred or honored story within their communities. This type of creative license involves taking risks and liberties for the sake of making connections and illuminating understanding. Making contemporary play with and on Scripture *is* our owning the Bible as our story in an openly-biased way as we seek words for the engagement of Scripture.

#### **Openly-Biased**

Making contemporary play on/with Scripture actively recognizes the inherent interpretative nature of any ideas we formulate based on our engagement with Scripture.

Miguel De La Torre explains that the Bible is a written text, and the tendency to state that the “Bible says” is a misnomer.<sup>261</sup> As a text, the Bible may state but never say; to say is a product of interpretation because as soon as we move beyond stating what is on the page, we are already engaging in the act of interpretation. Interpretation itself does not take place in a “social or cultural vacuum” but in contrast:

We ascertain the meaning of the text through the telling of our own stories, projecting onto the Bible how we define and interpret the biblical story in light of our own life experiences.<sup>262</sup>

The person of the preacher, the community of the preacher, the experiences of the preacher, and the received tradition of interpretation influences a preacher’s interactions with and interpretation of Scripture. This influence includes the connections a preacher makes within the text and between the text and life experiences. These connections move beyond what the Bible states, to how the biblical story is imagined, and finally into saying something and having import for the present day. Making contemporary play actively calls forth aspects of Scriptures’ culturally-imagined import, which are already latent in our engagement with Scripture.

As we approach Scripture, we are never capable of removing our own experiences from that encounter, nor from our imagining of connections within the text or between the text and our experiences. Therefore, instead of assuming a faux objectivist standpoint, the alternative is to acknowledge our imagination and experiences from the outset by fully incorporating and acknowledging them during the process. This acknowledgement includes bringing to our engagement with Scripture both what Tisdale describes as the

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<sup>261</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

community's folk language, as well as LaRue's roaming fertile imagination; thus allowing our social and cultural influences to make play on and *with* an ancient text.

#### Making an Inscription of Play: Paraphrasing

Inscription is significant as a process of memory and meaning-making in contemporary play. In preaching, we ultimately have to give words to what we have experienced while "living in a text."<sup>263</sup> In giving words we bear witness to not only what we have seen and experienced, but also to what we believe; it is confessional.<sup>264</sup> This giving of words is the process of description. Carter states:

'Description' is the art of writing down and writing-upon, so that others can see and understand our words. We can describe an object that exists or an image that does not exist. ...if we are good at it we can help our listeners see and hear what we describe.... Whatever we describe to others about a text, whatever we try to say about it, is first de-scribed for them in us, through our engagement with that text—because engagement leaves its own marks...An honest description comes from deep engagement that could easily have been otherwise if the preacher let fear and absolutes read the day.<sup>265</sup>

As we write and re-write our experience of the written text, we inevitably portray our innermost beliefs, convictions, and experiences of Scripture. The process of writing helps the preacher discover her convictions about the passage, words for describing that conviction, and words for helping others experience Scripture. In contemporary play, the hope is that inscription meets cultural influence.

Paraphrase is a form of inscription; specifically, it is a form of inscription that keeps the text and contemporary world in direct conversation. Paraphrase allows the text to take on contemporary characters and everyday life experiences. Many of our preachers

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<sup>263</sup> Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 133.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-44.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-45.

studied seem to be engaging in paraphrase in its most literal and expansive sense. For instance, a paraphrase could be a recreation of the entire passage, recreation from a particular character's perspective, or a completely different genre, as in song, poem, or prose. Within the trajectory of inscribing with and upon something else, a physical structure of art could be another form of paraphrase.

Inscription conceals content at the same time that it reveals content. When paraphrasing, aspects of a passage are often left out or pushed into the background. Rather than "preaching the paraphrase," it is important for preachers to examine for additional meanings the content pushed aside during paraphrastic inscription, and to explore both the absent and present content for the sermon's message.

#### Contemporary Play on/with Scripture In Practice:

1. Identify where you locate the biblical story in today's story (including its sounds, characters, textures, and emotions)?
2. Are there points of similarity and dissimilarity between the text and today's world?
3. Where do you connect and/or disconnect with what is occurring in the text?
4. Where do you agree or disagree with what is taking place in the Scripture based on your experience?
5. Is there anything that gives you pause or reservation based on your experience?
6. Create a paraphrase of the text based on what you have discovered through encountering, embodying, and naming points of identification.
7. Consider what aspects of the passage remain present, significant, and/or completely disappear from the paraphrase? Explore this absent and present content for a sermon message.

## Tracking Down the Text

As our preachers take creative license, they also speak based upon various degrees of information about Scripture. They do not rely on “simply what I think about this passage.” Instead, they blend their encounter with a passage, with the tradition’s narration of it. Tradition is used in its multiple forms, including the community’s tradition, scholarly tradition, and personal histories of interpretation. The ability to track down the interpretation of a text is a key element in sermon preparation. Tracking down a text is a means to perform a ‘check and balance’ of the overall messages’ validity. It also helps preachers demonstrate knowledge of the received tradition, and potentially counter opposition to messages that are “against the grain” of the immediate tradition. At the same time, knowledge of the inherited tradition of Scripture provides limitations to the extent of the preacher’s play on and interpretation of Scripture, even as it simultaneously opens up possibilities of interpretation.

There are two crucial contributions to preaching from “tracking down the text.” First, in tracking down a text, the preacher begins placing her individual interpretation in conversation with other interpretations, moving towards discerning validity in interpretation through community. The need for both the recognition and ongoing engagement between interpretations is evidenced in history. As social location cannot be stripped from biblical interpretations, all interpretations are “autobiographical,” whether or not their autobiographical nature is acknowledged.<sup>266</sup> European middle and upper class men have often hid the autobiographical nature of interpretation through purporting the objective nature of interpretation. These interpretations do not account for the

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<sup>266</sup> De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins*, 4.

experiences and reading of the Bible by those on the margins, thus limiting their import and authority in the lives of those on the margins, while often inflicting more harm than creating good news.<sup>267</sup> These power dynamics exist within the larger activity of engaging Scripture and within subcultures of those “on the margins” as we ignore our biases in interpretation. For example, the interpretation of a text by a heterosexual Black male within a male-centered Black church tradition may be different from the interpretation of a Black lesbian in that same tradition. De La Torre offers that correction comes in putting normative interpretations in conversation with the interpretations of those “on the margins,” liberating both the privileged and the underprivileged.<sup>268</sup> Ultimately, interpretation is influenced by experience; which, unavoidably, must be acknowledged as we engage Scripture, but only in communities wherein we are truly able to explore the limits and possibilities of interpretation.

Second, as the imagination is continually engaged in the preaching process, the preacher increases his ability to make imaginative connections about the import and possibilities of Scripture’s meaning within his community as he explores additional resources. These thoughts of possibility and import are the *informed imaginative thoughts* of the preacher, as addressed above.<sup>269</sup> LaRue states that “informed reflection unleashes imaginative potential” as it places before the preacher “unlimited ideas and ways of envisioning” a text.<sup>270</sup> This is the time when the preacher “brings the formal tools of study” to her interaction with Scripture, including dictionaries, commentaries, lexicons,

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>269</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, 76.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

and articles.<sup>271</sup> In this phase of study, as the preacher sifts through information, she is able to determine new insights, including what is pertinent and impertinent, what has possibilities, and what poses limitations. Considering the autobiographical nature of interpretation and the power and privilege inherent in the ability to write and publish, a preacher needs to give attention to both variety in resource materials and the resources that may not be “in print” but that are a part of the community’s interpretive history. Attending to print resources and “non-print” communal resources assists the preacher in attending to the tradition of Scripture in its normative and marginal traditions. At this juncture, the preacher is continuing her work as an ethnographer while reading the signs and symbols of the community and tradition.<sup>272</sup>

#### Tracking Down the Text In Practice:

1. Write down anything you already know about the social location, setting, time, or characters within the passage.
2. Write down anything you know about how and where the passage is usually referenced within the community or faith tradition. Also consider the significant times when members of the community reference the passage (i.e. in passing phrases, abbreviated forms, funerals, weddings, pastoral situations, constantly preached or referenced, of great importance or not).
3. Based on what has been determined thus far in tracking down the text, what do you need to learn more about? Consult people, commentaries, dictionaries, and articles written by individuals from a variety of gendered, ethnic, and cultural social locations.
4. Be sure to continue the imaginative process as you explore resources, make connections, and explore the meaning of your engagement with Scripture.

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>272</sup> Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*.

At the end of this process, the hope is that the preacher allows Scripture and the daily life world to be mutually influential in the process of interpretation. The process of engaging Scripture functions as a point of reference because the preacher is making decisions about the main message she wishes to preach and the best ways to illuminate that message. The process can be maximized within a group setting in which multiple individuals are able to dialogue around a particular passage. The more opportunities we have to make play on and with Scripture, the greater our level of comfort will be with engaging the Bible as our story, and having lively possibilities in our midst.

### **Conveying Truth**

Our preachers operate within a communally-assertive framework when creating and conveying their messages. Their speech is confident and involves direct language with immediate implications, always grounded within the responsibility to find good news for their community. They continually offer a message for *right here and right now*, communicating that truth is breaking into the midst of the gathered body. Often, they arrive at *right here and right now* good news by getting listeners on board by establishing a trajectory of smaller claims about the interpretation of Scripture as it relates to life, and by helping listeners to identify their everyday experiences within the message. Conveying truth within this trajectory frames truth in a way that says, in effect, that listeners' ability to recognize truth is just as important as making truth claims.

### **Learning to Convey Truth**

Learning to convey truth in this manner begins with an understanding that truth must be recognized as truth on "this day." The message possesses authority and opens

new possibilities, in so far as it is immediately relevant. First, the immediacy within this way of constructing and developing a message assumes that there is something at stake in hearing or not hearing the message, which is called *what's at-stake*. Second, when something *is* at stake, the message brings with it the possibility of influence, new direction, and/or new vision, or *possibility thinking*. Third, it is important to note that the possibilities that the message brings are not general or abstract possibilities, but possibility itself is woven into very particular areas of the community's life, which is called *taking root and growing roots*. Finally, after determining the very particular areas of the community's life to which the message speaks, the next step of conveying truth involves the preacher's narrating the message through the various points of connection with communal and individual experience, or *returning to familiar experience*. As a preacher develops his or her message, what is at stake in the message, the initial visions of possibility the message creates, where the message will take root, and the familiar experiences that influence it all help to support the process of truth development and recognition via its strong connections with present lived experience. These connections leave room for the listener's imagination to meet the preacher's imagination, expanding the realities the message makes possible in everyday life.

### **What's At-Stake?**

Our preachers communicate ownership of their message through confident speech, which includes a level of certainty and conviction about their messages. Through their use of active, present, and indicative speech forms, they demonstrate their conviction in the message they preach while engaging themes of survival and thriving on both the individual and community levels. Both of these themes and conviction provide

the tempo for their messages. They know that there is a “so what?” aspect to the message, and they name as well as own this “so what” in the sermon. In being able to name and locate the significance of her message, a preacher is able to better recognize and own what is at stake in the message. The “at-stake” aspect of the message includes what makes the message worth listening to and being preached, as well as what hangs in the balance or remains at-risk if the message is neither preached nor received. As our preachers exhibit conviction and the significance of their messages, they are agile in their ability to communicate the authority of their message within the lives of listeners in concrete and poignant ways that remain responsible to their contexts. A preacher cannot help listeners recognize and locate the significance of her message unless she has first identified the significance of her message in sermon development. Being able to locate what is at stake for the community in a message is the gateway to telling truth that remains purposefully responsible to the community.

The preacher’s own experience of the message becomes the initial site of the vision and possibilities opened up by a message. Similarly, in the preacher’s experience of the message, he or she begins to understand the significant possibilities and risks of the message’s never manifesting itself in the minds and hearts of the listeners. Because preaching is both an action of God’s claim on us and an act of human performance, the preacher as human performer is the first one acted upon as she makes herself available to hear the claim on her own life in sermon preparation and delivery.<sup>273</sup> Hearing, receiving, and experiencing God’s claim is the location of the preacher’s investment and conviction

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<sup>273</sup> Alyce M. McKenzie, "At the Intersection of *Actio Divina* and *Homo Performans*: Embodiment and Evocation," in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 57.

in preaching.<sup>274</sup> This very conviction and investment is tied to the risk and possibilities inherent in the message's being preached and not being preached.

Right-here and right-now truth meets and articulates with conviction something about both the matters hanging in the balance, as well as hope and inspiration. There is a tendency for those on the margins to read the Bible with “what’s at-stake” in view in very concrete ways for thriving and survival. Miguel de la Torre describes the tendency for individuals from the margins to read the Bible in search of words of hope and inspiration in the struggle to survive systems and power structures in which they are not privileged by the dominant culture. This survey of the text for hope is in contrast to surveying the text for general universal truths.<sup>275</sup> Reading for hope attempts to “grasp God in the midst of struggle and oppression.”<sup>276</sup> De La Torre states that “when people live under oppressive structures, they turn to the Bible for the strength to survive another day, not to figure out how long a day lasted in Genesis 1.”<sup>277</sup> Affirming these same sentiments as a part of the history of African Americans’ interpretation of the Bible, Cleophus J. LaRue explains that it is the “daily struggle of survival” that makes the “ring of truth heard” and important within Black preaching traditions.<sup>278</sup> The search for hope insinuates that there is something at stake, and a need for hope to exist.

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>275</sup> De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins*, 38-39.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>278</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, 76-77.

What's At-Stake? In Practice:

After narrowing down in a sentence or two the primary message to be preached, ask the following questions:

1. What is at stake in this message?
2. What hangs in the balance?

Because it is entirely possible that something can be “at-stake” and yet remain relatively insignificant, it is important to ask another set of questions:

1. Is this message significant?
2. What difference would it make if the message was never preached, or if the message was never received?
3. Why does it matter?
4. Why is it important?

Because it is important to keep messages experientially focused, it is a good idea to ask another set of questions as well:

1. Whose lives do you hope the message will affect?
2. What circumstance(s) might this message affect?

Being able to test a message and attend to these questions in an efficient way establishes both the foundation of the preacher's conviction about the message she brings, and reinforces her accountability to locating good news that has authority within the community.

### **Possibility Thinking**

Just as there is something at stake within a message, there is also something to gain, and new possibilities to discover if the message is preached and received. As our preachers usher their listeners to the door of the immediacy of their messages, they also

open the door and showed them new possibilities. They communicate that the status quo, present state, or current predicament is not always that which is ultimately desirable or the final judgment of the way things are, should be, or will be. They then offer a new vision or framework for conceptualizing life and life matters, albeit in sometimes-subtle ways.

These new possibilities are the impetus of “good news” or “gospel” within the message and to the community, giving the message a dynamic of inspiration and vision. Being able to dream up the possibilities of a message and its claims on the life of the community is of real importance because it moves past the “so what” and helps facilitate memorable and inspiring significance of the message as it relates to God’s vision.

The word preached offers something very specific within our lives; specifically a new vision and realm of ordering based on God’s vision and eschatological future.<sup>279</sup> Walter Brueggemann explains the functions of prophets and prophesy in the Hebrew Bible, and explores the ways in which the prophetic message was energizing and offered both inspiration and hope—even as it sometimes corrected, warped, and distorted cultural narratives. The prophetic message offered a new corrective, a counter-narrative to the current narrative of the world in which the people of God lived. For instance, as the words of Moses critiqued the Empire and culture of empire, they simultaneously energized the children of Israel in the vision and trust of YHWH, even as that vision was not fully known.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). Also see: *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

<sup>280</sup> *The Prophetic Imagination*, 14-15.

One distinction of the prophetic new vision is its particularity: it is written for a community in a very particular place and time.<sup>281</sup> The prophetic is a new vision for the here and now—not for the future by and by. It is also a vision of possibility and imagination;<sup>282</sup> this is the nature of the prophetic imagination. The prophetic imagination ushers in the gospel or good news; at its core it is theological,<sup>283</sup> as it brings the narrative of God into direct confrontation with the constantly re-playing narrative loops within the dominant culture. In one situation, the loop of injustice is confronted with God's desire, preference, and call for justice here and now. In another instance, the loop of hopelessness and despair is confronted by the narrative of relief and hope.

Alyce McKenzie appropriates Charles Bartow's practical theology of proclamation in describing the visionary possibility that motivates and drives preaching and the preaching moment:<sup>284</sup>

Preaching issues a claim, it directs us toward a future and to Him to whom the future belongs. The referent of a sermon... is not something in the past, nor is it any individual thing or circumstance of the present. Instead the referent of a sermon is what lies beyond. Preaching has to do with what yet may be.<sup>285</sup>

In this way, preaching is both performative and evocative; it evokes wonder and possibility as the experience of the community and preacher meet the text and action of God in preaching.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> McKenzie, "At the Intersection of *Actio Divina* and *Homo Performans: Embodiment and Evocation*," 57.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. As found in: Charles L. Bartow, *God's Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 111.

<sup>286</sup> Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit, *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life, Engaging Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 58.

## Possibility Thinking In Practice:

In order to explore the visionary possibilities in a sermon's message, the preacher can begin by posing questions to the message that seeks to tease out inspiration and vision. Here is a short list:

1. What possibilities are opened up by this message?
2. What promises does this message hold?
3. What makes this message inspiring?
4. What claims does this message make on my life?
5. What new possibilities, visions, or narratives does this message want to create in my experience?"

## **Taking Root, Growing Roots**

The new possibilities that a message brings are concretized through the everyday life experiences of individuals. A prominent aspect of our women's proclamations is their relevance to everyday life. They are able to zoom in on very specific circumstances of human existence, and work within and out of those circumstances as the means of demonstrating and illuminating a message's significance. Preaching in this way, they seek out places where the seeds of the message may take root in the lives of individuals, and then attend to those places in their messages. Their ability to use familiar experience and Scripture in tandem with major claims is the vehicle that creates room for truth to be both recognized and experienced, *right here and right now*.

Finding a place for a message to speak and retain pertinence in the community helps listeners identify with the good news, its significance, and its imminence in their lives. Cleophus J. LaRue explains the four interworking parts of Black preaching traditions as: the preacher, Scripture, Black lived experience, and God. The aspects are

difficult to detangle from one another.<sup>287</sup> He contends that the preacher “must make a connection between the God who acts in Scripture and the God who acts in their everyday life.”<sup>288</sup> LaRue refers to a common exchange in call and response during a sermon that illuminates the listeners’ desire for and expectation of the preacher to make room for and show the messages’ connection with lived experience:

In the call and response that is so much a part of traditional Black preaching one can hear a congregant shout and say, “Make it plain, preacher!” In other words, make the connection between the God of the Scriptures and the God who is at work in my life this day. The connection does not always have to be explicit, and in many instances the listener can make the connections if the preacher is skilled in painting the picture.<sup>289</sup>

Listeners seek points of connection with the message and Scripture; a sermon’s and the preacher’s hope in making it plain is to illuminate the “insightful perspective” a message offers to lived experience, and to, in turn, touch the human condition as opposed to simply offering theological treatises removed from lived experience.<sup>290</sup>

The shout of “make it plain!” is a shout for clarity and poignancy in the preacher’s narration of the text, the message, and its immediate import or connection to lived experience. Even in its clarity and poignancy the narration leaves room for listener imagination to meet the preacher’s imagination, allowing the listener to fill in the relevance of the message for her own life’s story. LaRue explains that the connection does not always have to be explicit and, depending on the preacher’s skills in narrating the picture, listeners can often make their own connections.<sup>291</sup> The ability to connect

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<sup>287</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, 57.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

Scripture, the message, and lived experience begins with the ability to imagine those points of connection.

When a preacher is able to imagine lived experiences in direct relation to the message, she is able to better narrate her message in a way that connects with those lived experiences; envisioning these connections is what affords the preacher the ability to “make it plain.” Making it plain helps the message take root and/or find its root, the place of generative possibility, in the life of the community. In locating where her message may take root, a preacher must simply brainstorm the various life scenarios to which the message may pertain and with which listeners may connect. This brainstorming includes circumstances within the lives of individuals, and circumstances within the life of the community. This brainstorming in practice can be viewed below in conjunction with the practices of returning to familiar experience.

### **Returning to Familiar Experience: Creating Mutual Experiences**

Our preachers’ messages are mediated through their abilities to engage the stories of their listeners along with the messages they convey. At times they attend to both the community and the individual in relation to narrating the space in which truth takes root and where the possibilities of their messages open up. In the process, they elevate individual stories as sacred matters of engagement alongside the larger community narratives. They also move between the personal and communal veracities of the message.<sup>292</sup> This movement is primarily undergirded by their knowledge, and makes use

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<sup>292</sup> In reality, micro and macro level thinking fit into all aspects of sermon development, including conveying truth, God talk, scripture, and familiar experience. By this time, the preacher most likely knows the main message she or he intends to convey, and has now begun thinking about the means through which he or she will convey that message. Therefore, micro and macro levels of thinking may be most

of both the individual struggle for daily life, survival, and thriving, and commonalities in that struggle. The movement between the personal and communal in the message provides listeners the opportunity to access the same ideas in alternative forms; this provides another means of both showing and connecting to the immediacy of the message. Additionally, this personal-communal movement creates a type of mutual experience among and between listeners and the preacher through a faux-community narrative or sacred story when one is not present or appropriate to engage with contemporary issues. For those preachers who are itinerants, moving from congregation to congregation, being able to create these mutual experiences assists the preacher in making points of connection with listeners when she does not have the opportunity to become deeply immersed within a particular congregation and its sacred stories.

Creating mutual experiences forms a type of common language within the gathered community, which supports listeners' abilities to not only understand the message, but to also recognize its veracity through its various points of connection with lived experience. In the process of constructing meaning, a preacher facilitates making a new text visible and available to the community.<sup>293</sup> Availability connotes a text's being accessible to listeners. This accessibility is granted through placing familiar experience side by side with a biblical text; not as a form of simply reporting or showing the text, but as a way to offer meaning (new text) that is forged out of both the biblical text and the

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generative at this juncture as the preacher is better able to fine-tune her use of all four aspects of the sermon in relationship to one another than earlier in the development process.

<sup>293</sup> Cleophus LaRue, "Two Ships Passing in the Night," in *What's the Matter with Preaching Today?*, ed. Mike Graves (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 132.

contemporary setting. In this regard, a preacher permits a text to be seen with “contemporary force and authority.”<sup>294</sup>

There are various means through which a preacher can narrate the relationship between lived experience, Scripture, and the message. John McClure refers to this process of making “cultural/experiential points of contact” with a sermon’s meaning as *narrative enculturation*.<sup>295</sup> Narrative enculturation may be considered in two ways. First, the actual narrative mechanisms are a means of making “points of contact” between contemporary experience and a sermon’s meaning. Narrative mechanisms, including figures of speech and imagery, are used in relationship to that which is familiar to listeners in order to show meaning in sermons.<sup>296</sup> The emphasis at this point is on the actual narrative mechanisms that are used to make points of connection and contact with the lived experience of listeners. The actual content of these narrative mechanisms is the second aspect of narrative enculturation, and is of primary concern in creating mutual experience.

How we make points of contact between a sermon’s ideas and lived experience also includes how we engage both personal and communal aspects of lived experience within narrative mechanisms like figures of speech, imagery, and storytelling. In creating mutual experience, the content of lived experience attends to both the personal and communal via narrative mechanisms. In part, engaging the personal and communal realities of lived experience in Black preaching traditions has facilitated the poignancy

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<sup>294</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 85.

<sup>295</sup> John S. McClure, "Narrative and Preaching: Sorting It All Out," in *Journal for Preachers* 15, no. 1 (1991): 26.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

and clarity of “making it plain.” Cleophus J. LaRue points out four aspects of lived experience that have been important in the history of Black preaching, including personal piety, care for the soul, social justice, and communal concerns.<sup>297</sup> The preacher addresses both the communal and personal realities of human experience as she or he attends to these four aspects of lived experience. The effectiveness of creating mutual experiences is in their ability to facilitate points of connection between the message and lived experience with veracity as they attend to the multiple aspects of lived experience, including the personal and communal.

The question is: how might a preacher go about the process of exploring the creation of mutual experiences as she returns to familiar experience as a means of making room for *the right here and now*? At this point, the preacher relies on her knowledge of her community, the human condition, and the process of engaging Scripture as a means of identifying where her message turns up the volume on certain aspects of lived experience. In this way of conveying truth, the preacher recreates the need or conditions for her message to be received by listeners. Here, learning to tell the human story in a variety of ways is central. This variety could include considering multiple stories that are not explicitly our own in multiple lengths, with varying degrees of specificity and vagueness. For example, if one is speaking of sadness and despair, and wants to communicate hope, consider how to depict the instance of sadness and despair in brevity

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<sup>297</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, 64-68. Personal piety includes addressing what LaRue calls “heart religion,” which attends to aspects of individual spiritual formation (i.e. prayer, maintenance of right relationship with God, moral conduct, and personal discipline). Care for the soul attends to an individual’s overall wellbeing as “they face the cares and challenges of human experience” (i.e. reconciliation of relationships, forgiveness, healing, grief). The domain of social justice attends to discriminatory systems and the accessibility of God’s power to reform those systems. Corporate concerns may include matters of social justice, but has its primary emphasis on those communal concerns specific to the experience and history of black life.

or at length. Then, consider ways to narrate a new vision and alternative reality into those same instances of sadness and despair.

#### Creating Mutual Experience In Practice:

The ability to imagine these spaces will be directly related to your engagement with the community and world around you. Pay attention to news stories, engage in people-watching, have conversations with others, and simply immerse yourself in community life and spaces. All of these practices help foster the ability to locate spaces within life where a message may speak, take root, and have vibrant possibilities:

1. Jot down specific situations occurring now in which this message might have generative possibility, especially places of despair, hope, discord, matters of provision, or in relationships.
2. List places in individuals' lives where this message might live and speak.
3. Think about the various groups of individuals who may encounter the message (i.e. children, women, men, LGBTQI persons, singles, partnered, the affluent, the disenfranchised, etc.). Pinpoint *specific* descriptions of individuals within a particular group (i.e. a young Black lesbian girl).
4. Consider how this very specific idea may be engaged from *multiple vantage points* as it relates to the individuals or group of individuals identified. Explore the use of several abbreviated snapshot descriptions, longer descriptions, and/or a combination of both, and reflect on the way that your message conveys truth by creating shared experience.

This process of conveying truth encourages the preacher to explore the veracity of the message by considering the ways in which the message has first made a claim on his or her own life. The extent to which the preacher is convinced of not only the message's significance, but of the possibilities that the Gospel presents for real-life situations hanging in the balance, influences the ability to then show the imminence of the message to "this day." Conveying the message alongside lived experience becomes the means of delivery for a message for *right here and right now*.

## Doing God-Talk

As I discussed earlier, our preachers' messages are strongly linked to operative theologies grounded in a sovereign-powerful and immanent God who has direct involvement in the lives of human beings—especially those who are believers. They rarely consider personal or social redemption outside the personal stability of the human and Divine relationship. A personal relationship with God, often based in the life, work, death, and ascension of Jesus, is of real importance when they calculate the certainty of Divine activity and engagement in everyday life matters. As they make a strong identification with God and the individual self as the predominantly reliable forms of help and support in everyday life matters, they also demonstrate why certainty of Divine activity is significant. If God and self are the primary means of thriving and survival, God is needed when the limits of self-help are exceeded. This form of God-talk cannot be separated from concrete experience.

### Learning to Do God-Talk

In learning this way of doing God-talk, a preacher explores ways to make explicit links between the overarching faith-story, everyday life matters, and knowledge of God on personal and communal levels. This way of God-talk requires that the preacher first determine the theological narrative at work in the message, which is *the overarching faith-story*. At this point, the content of the narrative is not as significant as being able to articulate an understanding of life with God and life with others. The greater certainty a preacher has about the theological narrative being communicated in a message, the better she or he is able to accomplish the second element of God-talk: relating that larger

narrative to its manifestation in concrete experience, or *God in the mundane*. This second element of God-talk entails making loops back to methods of conveying truth that attend to the ways in which our ways of knowing influence our understanding of meaning. Therefore, attention to concrete experience is not enough. The preacher seeks to attend to concrete experience in ways that address personal, or *God in the personal*, and communal, or *God in the communal*, aspects of life with God and life with others. Attending to God-talk helps locate the message's *right here and right now*, specifically as it relates to the community's identification as a community of *faith*.<sup>298</sup>

### **The Overarching Faith-Story**

Our preachers demonstrated remarkable similarity in their overarching faith-stories. These stories facilitate both their vision of God's activity in everyday life and the ways in which they narrate God's activity in everyday life. For instance, their descriptions of God in relationship with humanity, and humanity's accepting that relationship ensures the certainty of God's action and help in everyday life. There is something at stake in their similar faith-stories; namely, the activity of God in this world and in the life of the believer. Their understandings of God's immanent presence and activity in everyday life parallels the way familiar experience is used to demonstrate the immediacy of their messages' meaning and importance. In other words, their similar convictions about the over-arching faith-story influence their similar connections between lived experience and the way their message is conveyed. The parallels made between the faith-story, lived experience, and the message is the glue that gives the

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<sup>298</sup> Due to the interconnectedness of aspects of practicing God-talk, an "In Practices" section is provided at the end of the chapter that combines the pursuit of the overarching faith-story with accessing God in the mundane, the personal, and the communal.

message contemporary authority and force. Locating the overarching faith-story enables a preacher to define the significance of her message within a theological framework.

Reframing the message within the faith-story helps connect concrete experience to the message in ways that ring true and important for people of faith.

A preacher's God-talk is reflected in the overall message conveyed and developed within a sermon, but it is not necessarily equal to that message.<sup>299</sup> A preacher's message may reflect a general theological framework that the preacher is narrating her sermon out of and/or responding to without explicating naming or stating that full blown narrative(s) within her message.<sup>300</sup> A preacher's God-talk is reflected in the overall way in which truth is conveyed and developed within a sermon, but is not necessarily equal to that message.<sup>301</sup> The preacher's use, engagement, and association between language and symbols are how one deciphers a sermon's God-talk.<sup>302</sup> And, the more a preacher is aware of her God-talk, the better she is able to convey her message in ways that make intentional and coherent associations between both the message and theology.

God-talk can be framed within an understanding of narrative. McClure explains that, when considered as a narrative, the construction of theology is closely related to the narrative and symbols of Scripture (i.e. God, Christ, humanity, sin, evil, the individual, redemption, etc.).<sup>303</sup> The loose and more firm associations a preacher makes with ideas

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<sup>299</sup> McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*, 93-94.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> John McClure uses cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz to explicate the role of symbols in the theosymbolic code of preaching (God-talk) as it relates to the semantic code (conveying-truth). For more information see: *ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-95.

of God, sin, redemption, and creation fit into some overarching narrative of the preacher's belief of these concepts in relation to one another. At this point, the meaning of those symbols and their interpretation is not what is of importance; rather, the ways in which the symbols are arranged in relation to one another in order to create a narrative are paramount.<sup>304</sup> In other words, the flow and construction of ideas in relationship to one another are the main focus in attending to narratives of the faith. As the preacher harnesses and becomes more aware of her overarching theological narrative, she is able to better refine it and make more substantive theological claims and/or associations within her sermon.<sup>305</sup> A sermon's overarching faith-story inevitably influences the content and composition of a preacher's message.

In trying to generate and/or ascertain the overarching faith-story inferred in a message, a preacher may consider what is being said about life, faith, humanity, and God. Attending to the presence of sin, separation, and opposition within the biblical story, the preacher may then consider what is being inferred about separation from self, separation from others, and/or separation from God. Now, assuming that God is an active character of the story, the preacher considers what God seeks to offers us, what seeks to hinder or hinders the reception of what God offers, and what helps us receive what God has to offer. The preacher can then resource the faith-story and fill it out by considering how her or his faith tradition, Scripture, and experience interacts with the narrative. In attending to

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

<sup>305</sup> In *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, John S. McClure and Burton Cooper offer a theological profile to help preachers explore their theological disposition and better understand how that may inform their preacher. Another resource is McClure's chapter on the "theosymbolic code" in *The Four Codes of Preaching*, which helps the preacher attend closely to their theological narratives through engaging the association of signs and symbols present within their sermons. Ibid; Burton Z. Cooper and John S. McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

the overarching faith-story, the preacher moves an implicit understanding about the relationship between the Divine and humanity into focused view for more intentional engagement.<sup>306</sup>

### **God in the Mundane**

Our preachers make their faith-stories concrete in everyday life matters through everyday associations of words and experiences. They do not leave the activity of God and certainty of God's presence in the abstract, nor do they leave it to a listener's imagination to construct it. They have a proclivity to name sin, name exactly what the intervention of God looks like, and narrate what faith looks like in everyday life. The preachers have the ability to bring what could be potentially obscure ideas of the faith-story (i.e., sin, salvation, redemption, etc.) into the mundane of everyday terms and experiences. This work is of significance because it creates another point of immediate recognition and a familiar place of engagement for listeners while undergirding the concreteness and relevance of the sermon to everyday life experiences. Being able to do God-talk through and with the mundane minimizes the distance between listeners and the authority of the message as it relates to living with God and with others.

We construct meaning through the association or disassociation between things in our everyday words and experiences. Tisdale offers that, in preaching, this construction of meaning is not *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, but is facilitated in a metaphorical way by placing objects beside one another that may not have previously existed side-by-side (i.e. the biblical text and the congregational context, faith and continuing to believe for

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<sup>306</sup> Below, I show how that this movement from implicit to implicit in conjunction with the mundane may work in "An Example: The Faith-Story and Mundane."

resources as a lack of resources exists, etc.).<sup>307</sup> Within this bilateral dance of two objects, the imagination is engaged and meaning is created. This dance is what is at work in the idea development of the preacher,<sup>308</sup> and it is also at work as the mundane, which is used as a means of doing God-talk.

Renaming and reassigning the faith story through everyday words and associations help locate and construct theological meaning in ways that remain in close proximity to lived experience. LaRue's explication that in preaching, the God at work in the Bible must be shown to be the God at work in this world,<sup>309</sup> is indicative of the way meaning is constructed by placing objects side by side. He is making a push for the translation of the narrative of Scripture and the theological arc of the text; this particular translation entails the narrative of Scripture being translated into the everyday words and associations of the Black lived experiences. In this regard, the meaning implicit in the symbols and narratives of the biblical story is aloof due to the distance of those narratives from Black lived experience, and finding symbols closer to Black lived experience brings meaning into closer proximity for the community. Within this proximity to lived experience is the place wherein the community is able to see the God who acts in the Bible as the same God acting on their behalf.

For a preacher to begin mining the everyday and mundane experience of this world as a means for communicating theological meaning and significance, she or he may start with simply making loose associations with the words and concepts identified in the original faith story. This would entail placing each word, short phrase or concept in

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<sup>307</sup> Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word*, 85.

<sup>308</sup> Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 37-38.

<sup>309</sup> LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*, 59-60.

isolation on a page and writing down beside that word the first images, words, and scenarios that come to mind. After making these associations, she might step back from the page and try to reconstruct the overarching faith-story based on the words on the page. The alternative would be to simply rewrite the overarching faith story several times until something recognizable and synonymous with concrete experience arises. The final step comes in the process of implementing these ideas into the sermon. The hope is that the preacher is able to better narrate the overarching faith-story and better narrate everyday experiences into the overarching faith-story.

#### The Faith-Story and The Mundane: An Example

In finding God in the mundane, a preacher turns to determining where and how the overarching faith-story of the sermon can be identified in everyday lived experience. The following narrative is a demonstration of translating the overarching faith story into the mundane:

God seeks to give us humanity, and—particularly for believers—abundant life. Sin hinders us from receiving that abundant life.

Doing God-talk by way of the mundane would need to concretize each of these somewhat vague and distant concepts (i.e. abundant life, sin,) within the everyday experiences and associations of the community's life. For instance, if sin hinders us from receiving the abundant life God offers, the next step is to concretize abundant life and sin.

Locating God in the mundane may consist of the following narrative:

Abundant life is safety, love, and provision in all areas of our lives. Sin and the opposition to that abundant life is the reality of greed by a few individuals taking more than needed, the threat of violence that occurs in abuse, and the lack of love for one's self.

But our narrative is still lacking. Hope is present in not only God's gift of abundant life, but in the help to receive the abundant life in the presence of that which seeks to hinder abundant life. This identification of help traces back to how and where our preachers communicated help in this world and in the struggle for living with God. As they relied primarily on themselves and God for help in this world and in the struggle of life and faith, the certainty of help was the catalyst of hope and inspiration. Our "God in the Mundane" narrative lacks the aspect of help because our original faith story lacked the aspect of help. Hope identified in the help to receive the gift of God's abundant life could be any of the following and more, depending on the preacher's theological beliefs:

Others hold us accountable in their willingness to intervene and confront our lack of self-love, safety, and provision, through concrete plans for safety, rescue, and rehabilitation; particularly when we have jeopardized our wellbeing by engaging in activities and relationships that do not affirm our value as human beings, and place our emotional and physical wellbeing in jeopardy.

The Spirit strengthens and enables us to overcome greed in our resources and to be a part of the community's pursuit of life abundant as we provide food for those without food, shelter for those without shelter, and medical services for those who cannot afford medical care.

### **God in the Personal**

Our preachers move beyond linking the faith-story to everyday words and associations. They take an additional step and connect personal knowledge of God to the overarching faith narrative. This connection of God to the personal entails finding the spaces in which individuals may explicitly name their experience of the Divine within the faith-story and find their location within the faith story. As the preachers engage the personal through the additional point of connection, they create a means of framing the message's theological significance. Also, similar to the use of the personal in conveying truth, the personal in God-talk locates a different type of veracity within the message.

Connecting God-talk to the personal is of significance because it recalls, reengages, and creates opportunity for the personal encounter of God in the listener's experience. As LaRue explains, the search and excavation of Scripture in African American preaching traditions, historically, does not hold Scripture as the idol sought after; instead, an encounter with God is what is sought in the engagement of Scripture and, conversely, in the preaching moment.<sup>310</sup> This encounter entails listeners' knowing and experiencing "A God who is unquestionably for them" and who "acts in practical and concrete ways" in their life and on their behalf.<sup>311</sup> The community and individuals within the community having accessibility to knowledge of the power and presence of God in personally tangible ways both recalls a way of knowing and understanding God, and facilitates a way of knowing and understanding God. God-talk is not simply about the meaning constructed through signs and symbols, but the point of connection and identification with the story of God and the knowledge of God's actions.

This accessibility and knowledge is not significant only within African American preaching traditions, but is a part of the larger tendency of some communities to approach biblical interpretation for the personal and private knowledge of God and its historical import. To some degree, the expectation of the personal in biblical interpretation and preaching exists within listeners. This search for the personal could be motivated by the divide of the "sacred" and "secular" domains of life, purporting that there is no genuine place for both the political and the social within church and communities of faith.<sup>312</sup> This

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>312</sup> Tisdale offers that this mentality facilitated the marginalization of "prophetic" and those who cared to preach about social and political dimensions of the gospel. Subsequently, the mentality has, to an

search for the personal may also arise from the genuine search and need for a personal and accessible God in the everyday struggle for life, as indicated in De La Torres' description of how those "on the margins" read the Bible.<sup>313</sup> Whether the personal is present by the division of sacred and secular, the struggle for survival—be it both/and or neither/nor—its presence as a point of connection exists within and is often sought by listeners.

When finding God in the personal, being able to tell the story is of significance while incorporating the overarching faith story and personal encounters within the narrative. The starting point for the preacher's imagination has to include her remembering her own point of entry in the overarching faith story. Just as the preacher is the first recipient of the message, she is also the first one shaped by the message.<sup>314</sup> In this regard, locating God in the personal encounter of the preacher is just as significant as the preacher's being apprehended by the message before it is offered to others. Therefore, the direct questions the preacher poses to self-seek, in order to understand where she enters the story; where she has known and understood God in this way; and where she has known and understood opposition and sin, and help and hope.

In moving to locate God in the personal outside of self, a preacher may consider imagining the faces of specific individuals and what their personal encounters with the Divine may be/have been within the faith story. This is similar to the way in which the personal is pursued in *creating mutual experiences* through imagining the individual. For

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extent, muted the prophetic in Christian preaching. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>313</sup> De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins*.

<sup>314</sup> McKenzie, "At the Intersection of *Actio Divina* and *Homo Performans: Embodiment and Evocation*," 58.

example, where does the battered spouse encounter God or God encounter him or her in this narrative? What about the abuser? The child? What about the person struggling to survive? Or the person without a care in the world?

### **God in the Communal**

The presence of the personal was vibrant within our preachers' sermons. Their extension of the implications of personal knowledge in community with others was sometimes limited. However, when they did extend very personal ways of entering the faith-story to make implications in relationship with others, the extension was undergirded by themes of accountability and responsibility in faith, God, and community. Their engagement of the implications of the faith-story in community with others strengthened the "at-stake" aspects of their message and the message's proximity to what it means to live a life with God and a life with others. Locating God in both the communal and the personal affords the preacher an opportunity to expand the potential narrowness of the personal and communal as lone entities.

More explicitly, uniting the personal and communal affirms that there is something significant about faith and the Gospel beyond the individual, and affirms that within the communal framework, faith and Gospel do not exclude individual bodies by absorbing them non-distinctly into the group. This connection between the personal and communal is demonstrated in the history of African American preaching during the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. Because of their personal-private understandings of the Gospel, some communities moved outward in action based on the also inherent social-corporate implications of the Gospel.

Those primarily responsible for teaching within faith communities are key in reshaping the private-personal and social-corporate theological discourses in relationship to one another. As a preacher depicts a very particular theological worldview, over time she also promotes within the community a very particular theological worldview—be it consciously or subconsciously.<sup>315</sup> Tisdale calls for the recovery of both the pastoral and the prophetic in preaching because she says that the personal and pastoral have overtaken the horizontal and social dimensions of preaching.<sup>316</sup> The influence of this “personal take over” are varied: from church traditions that fostered an emphasis on personal piety and silencing the social and horizontal dimensions of the gospel (prophetic), to ongoing Christian education programs that focus on individual perspectives, beliefs, and meaning as it relates to biblical interpretation and engagement.<sup>317</sup> Dieter Hessel, the social ethicist who Tisdale engages for the recovery of a social and horizontal hermeneutic in preaching, states: “of particular interest...is the method of interpretation which makes clear the liberating meaning of Biblical texts for human-social existence today.”<sup>318</sup> Hessel’s practical method probes for the “personal-private” and “social-corporate” questions within Bible studies of faith communities; calling for teachers and leaders of

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<sup>315</sup> John McClure explains this promotion of worldviews as the vouching for intertext, in which theological narratives take on a variety of styles including various degrees of negative and positive as it relates to God, humanity, and opposition in the giving and receiving of the redemption God offers. See: McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*, 130-32. In *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, John McClure and Burton Z. Cooper attend to five dominant theistic worldviews. A preacher’s theological worldview influences her view of doctrines of the church, the role and authority of Scripture, reason and tradition, eschatological beliefs, understandings and interpretations of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the source and genesis of theology in relation to experience. See: Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 31-35, 136.

<sup>316</sup> Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 28.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 25-27; Dieter T. Hessel, *Social Ministry*, Rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1992), 100.

Bible studies to stretch participants by asking for both their private-personal and social-corporate interpretations of a text.<sup>319</sup>

At this point, the question becomes: how do those who are primarily responsible for education in faith communities (and this includes preachers) reconnect with the social-corporate dimensions of biblical interpretation? Tisdale suggests that the impetus and motivation of our attention to the social dimension of preaching and its message is our firsthand experience and encounter with individuals who are suffering.<sup>320</sup> In other words, connecting to suffering and recognizing the suffering of others provides a lens for helping move our preaching along the continuum from the inward focus of the personal to the outward focus of the other. This includes moving between private and personal suffering and the corporate as well as personal suffering of others. In preaching, we strive towards recognizing and connecting both the personal and communal significance and import in our God-talk.

As a preacher seeks to extend the personal of God-talk to the communal, his or her attention should include considering the implications of one's own responsibility to others based on this knowledge and encounter of the faith-story and/or God. She should consider where "the other" enters the faith-story, what the particular faith-story may mean for the world in which we live, who benefits from the story, who is counted as insignificant within it, and the kind of response the faith-story requires from the community of faith.

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<sup>319</sup> *Social Ministry*, 100-01.

<sup>320</sup> Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 25-26.

Attending to God-talk in sermon development helps the preacher to determine not only what is at stake in her message, but what is theologically at stake and of significance *about* her message. Again, God-talk is one of the key factors that helps differentiate a sermon from an important or inspiring speech, and is thus an important aspect of sermon development. When our conceptualization of the overarching faith-story of our sermons is robust, we are better able to engage and utilize Scripture, truth, and familiar experience in developing the overall sermon. Reflecting on God-talk is helpful both in the initial creative process, and as a tool of analysis after the sermon is developed and determined to be pulpit-ready.

#### Doing God-Talk In Practice

1. In trying to ascertain the overarching faith-story, what is being described about life, faith, humanity, and God in this message?
2. Now consider the following: what is being inferred about separation from self, separation from God, and separation from others in this message?
3. Go back to words and ideas formulated in brainstorming the overarching faith-story. Jot down and say aloud the first thoughts, words, images, and ideas that come to mind as you attend to each idea or word.
4. Now, step back from the page and your brainstorming. Try to re-write or reconstruct your overarching faith-story based on the new words, phrases, and images on the page.
5. Where do YOU enter this faith-story?
6. Where does the “other” enter this faith story?
7. Now, re-write the faith story in a way that seeks to account for your exploration and discoveries in “God in the Mundane,” “God in the Personal,” and “God in the Communal.”

## Conclusion

These preaching women's use of sermon design and organization as it relates to navigating listener expectations is not a unique approach to preaching. On the contrary, their use of design and organization continues the historical practice of preaching: attempting to overcome obstacles to the communication of the Gospel as one engages Scripture, uses the life world of her listeners, and engages matters of faith. These women's greatest improvisation is the *content* of their sermon organization and design. Their sermon content is where their personas of Black and woman meet, creating something that is neither distinctively Black nor distinctively woman as a way of preaching, but that is nevertheless distinctively theirs. This improvisation is what we seek to learn as preachers and to teach students of preaching; namely, taking the expected and making it our own as we seek to communicate a significant message as competent proclaimers.

A good sermon is not only recognizable, it demonstrates the best practices of preaching and the sometimes non-descript markings of the preacher and her experiences. Indeed, there are structuring structures that have made a sermon and its delivery, the preaching moment, recognizable as such. Also, there are ways in which one can creatively engage these structures to gain a listening ear as she seeks to effectively communicate the gospel. The substance of preaching as creative ingenuity is the demonstration of the best practices of preaching in conjunction with the non-descript qualities of preaching expressed in distinctive ways.

## APPENDIX

A:

### CREATIVE INGENUITY IN A SNAPSHOT

#### Using Familiar Experience

##### Finding the Community's Sacred Stories

<b>Step One</b>	Jot down significant events in the life of the community (in its most immediate and broadest capacity) in the past year, five years, and ten years
<b>Step Two</b>	Out of these events, are there events that are counted as “sacred?” In terms of having special meaning, re-told over and over again, and/or acknowledge as significant by many members of the community.
<b>Step Three</b>	From whose point of view are these stories usually told?

##### Creating Mutual Experience

This process is intended to follow your work in engaging scripture and conveying truth, specifically after making contemporary play with scripture and determining where the message will take root in the lives of listeners.

<b>Step One</b>	Consider what experiences you will focus on in the daily life world. (i.e. grief, self-doubt, joy, loneliness, etc.)
<b>Step Two</b>	How might various individuals encounter or be narrated into this experience? (i.e. children, women, men, LGTQI persons, singles, partnered, the affluent, the disenfranchised, etc.)
<b>Step Three</b>	Brainstorm how you might engage a single experience, which you have identified, from the multiple vantage points in Step Two. Consider exploring several abbreviated snapshot descriptions, longer descriptions, and/or a combination of both.

### Recovering the Voiced- Doing Voiceovers

<b>Step One</b>	Jot down those who are considered wisdom bearers for the community (consider community its most immediate and broadest capacity). As you think of wisdom bearers or those who have voice consider, who is often quoted? Who are important familial figures? Who are “experts” in various areas, fields, and life-knowledge that are acknowledged and respected by the community?
<b>Step Two</b>	Now, take about two minutes to say aloud as many phrases as you can that are often said or known within the community. Jot them down or record them as you’re saying them.
<b>Step Three</b>	Take another minute to quickly write who comes to mind when you hear each phrase (i.e. who usually says this?).
<b>Step Four</b>	Take a minute to briefly take notes about what first comes to mind when you hear the phrase as it relates to its meaning (i.e. hope, faith, life, uncertainty, jealousy, greed, happiness, etc.).

### Using the Familiar to Transform the Familiar

<b>Step One</b>	Brainstorm the ways in which the easily recognizable and/or familiar is usually expressed in sermons to the community (i.e. Is the familiar usually conveyed via story, song, quotes, passing phrases, or celebration?).
<b>Step Two</b>	Go back to think about your brainstorming in recovering the voiced of the community. As you look over the voiced within the community, are there alternative figures that may not be well known but still fit the characteristics of these wisdom bearers? (For instance if Martin Luther King, Jr. is a recognized wisdom bearer, marked by leadership characteristics and community mobilization, Septima Poinsette Clark may be an alternative wisdom bearer.)
<b>Step Three</b>	As it relates to the phrases and quotes you identified as reoccurring within the community, do you find problems with or disagree with those phrases? If so, what counter images or phrases do you have to place alongside of those phrases?
<b>Step Four</b>	Go back to think about your brainstorming in finding the community’s sacred narratives. Who is usually left unattended in the story(ies)?
<b>Step Five</b>	Where might your counter or alternative images, phrases, and stories be combined with, intersect, or make-a-new these normal means of expressing

	the familiar?
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## Engaging Scripture

### Beyond Memory to Immediate Encounter

<b>Step One</b>	Read the passage slowly. Try to restrain the tendency to fill in the story from memory.
<b>Step Two</b>	Read the passage aloud or consider having someone else read it aloud and listen to it. If it is a narrative text, have different individuals take on the voices of different characters.
<b>Step Three</b>	List all of the characters present (both major and minor).
<b>Step Four</b>	What are the personal characteristics of the characters?
<b>Step Five</b>	List the imagery present in the text (i.e. rocky roads, dirt roads, streams, city, fire, etc.).

### Embodying the Text

<b>Step One</b>	Read aloud, listen to, or sign the passage, as applicable. Pay attention to the various sounds or inflections in the passage and write them down (i.e. Are there cries? Soft voices? Loud voices? Animals? Laughter?).
<b>Step Two</b>	Read, sign, or listen to the passage again, and pay attention to the emotions in the passage and write them down (i.e. Is there anger present? Jealousy? Sadness? Shame?)
<b>Step Three</b>	Read the passage a third time and pay attention to who speaks, to whom is spoken, who is spoken about, and who doesn't speak at all?
<b>Step Four</b>	Write down the "feelings" you experience after reading the passage.

## Making Contemporary Play on and with the Text

Revisit your brainstorming in “beyond memory to immediate encounter” and “embodying the text” and consider the following:

<b>Step One</b>	Where can you locate the biblical story in today’s story? (including its sounds, characters, textures, and emotions)
<b>Step Two</b>	Are there points of similarity and dissimilarity between the text and today’s world?
<b>Step Three</b>	Where do you connect and/or disconnect with what is occurring in the text?
<b>Step Four</b>	Where do you agree or disagree with what is taking place in scripture based on your experience?
<b>Step Five</b>	Is there anything that gives you pause or reservation based on your experience?
<b>Step Six</b>	Now, create a paraphrase of the text. (A paraphrase can be done in the most literal or expansive sense. In its most expansive sense: as a recreation of the entire passage, as recreation from a particular character’s perspective, and/or as a completely different genre as in song, poem, prose, or physical structure of art.)
<b>Step Seven</b>	After creating your paraphrase, consider: what aspects of the passage remain in your paraphrase? become significant in your paraphrase? and/or completely disappear from your paraphrase?

## Tracking Down the Text

<b>Step One</b>	Is there anything you already know about the social location, setting, time, or characters within the passage?
<b>Step Two</b>	How and where is this passage usually referenced within your community or faith tradition and with what significance? (i.e. passing phrases, abbreviated forms, constantly preached or referenced, of great importance or not)?
<b>Step Three</b>	Based on what you have determined thus far, what do you <i>need</i> to learn more about?

<b>Step Four</b>	Based on what you have determined thus far, what do you <i>want</i> to learn more about?
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### Conveying-Truth

#### What's At-Stake?

<b>Step One</b>	Why does this message matter? Why is it important?
<b>Step Two</b>	Whose lives or what situations will this message most influence?
<b>Step Three</b>	What difference will it make if this message is never preached?
<b>Step Four</b>	What difference will it make if the community does not receive it?

### Possibility Thinking

<b>Step One</b>	What new possibilities does this message open up?
<b>Step Two</b>	What promises does this message hold?
<b>Step Three</b>	How might this message shift the realities of life in my present context?
<b>Step Four</b>	How might this message shift the realities of life in the larger world?
<b>Step Five</b>	What makes this message inspiring?
<b>Step Six</b>	What claims does this message make on my life?
<b>Step Seven</b>	What new narratives, possibilities, or vision does this message create in my life?

### Taking Root, Growing Roots

<b>Step One</b>	Take time to take in what's happening around you. Watch people. Watch movies. Watch the news. Attend artistic productions. Be a participant-observer in everyday life.
<b>Step Two</b>	To what places in the community's life does or will the message speak?

<b>Step Three</b>	To what places in individuals' lives does or will this message speak?
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### Returning to Familiar Experience: Creating Mutual Experiences

<b>Step One</b>	Consider what experiences you will focus on in the daily life world. (i.e. grief, self-doubt, joy, loneliness, etc.)
<b>Step Two</b>	How might various individuals encounter or be narrated into this experience?
<b>Step Three</b>	Narrate the description of one individual within the groups of individuals identified in step two.
<b>Step Four</b>	Brainstorm how you might engage this single experience from the multiple vantage points. Consider exploring several abbreviated snapshot descriptions, longer descriptions, and/or a combination of both.
<b>Step Five</b>	Repeat step three from the vantage point of a group of individuals identified in step two, or from the vantage point of the larger community.

## Doing God-Talk

### The Overarching Faith-Story

<b>Step One</b>	What is being described about life, faith, humanity, and God in this message?
<b>Step Two</b>	What is being inferred about separation from self, separation from God, and separation from others in this message?
<b>Step Three</b>	What is God seeking to offer in this message?
<b>Step Four</b>	What hinders the reception of that which God seeks to offer?
<b>Step Five</b>	What helps us receive that which God seeks to offer?

### God in the Mundane

<b>Step One</b>	Go back to words and ideas formulated in brainstorming the overarching faith-story. Jot down and say aloud the first thoughts, words, images, and ideas that come to mind as you attend to each idea or word.
<b>Step Two</b>	Now, step back from the page and your brainstorming. Try to re-write or reconstruct your overarching faith-story based on the new words, phrases, and images on the page.
<b>Step Three</b>	Or try repeatedly writing the overarching faith story with “mundane” words until something recognizable and synonymous with concrete experience develops on the page. The goal is to write as a form thinking, via continuous writing, versus thinking and then writing.

### God in the Personal

<b>Step One</b>	Where do you enter this faith-story?
<b>Step Two</b>	Where or how have you known and understood God in this way?
<b>Step Three</b>	Where or how have you known and understood sin and opposition in this way?
<b>Step Four</b>	Where or how have you known and understood help and hope in this way?
<b>Step Five</b>	Imagine the faces of specific individuals, as in creating mutual experiences.
<b>Step Six</b>	What might their encounter with the Divine be in this faith-story?
<b>Step Seven</b>	Where might they enter this faith story?

### God in the Communal

<b>Step One</b>	What is my responsibility to others based on my understanding and encounter with this faith-story?
<b>Step Two</b>	Where does the “other” enter this faith story?
<b>Step Three</b>	Who benefits in this faith-story?

<b>Step Four</b>	Who is suffering in this faith-story?
<b>Step Five</b>	Who is counted as significant in this faith story?
<b>Step Six</b>	Where are “the least of those” accounted for in this faith story?
<b>Step Seven</b>	What helps bring about God’s vision for all in this faith story?
<b>Step Eight</b>	What does this particular faith story mean for the world?
<b>Step Nine</b>	What does this particular faith-story require of my community?
<b>Step Ten</b>	Now, re-write the faith story in a way that seeks to account for your exploration and discoveries in “God in the Mundane,” “God in the Personal,” and “God in the Communal.”

APPENDIX

B:

FULL SERMON ANALYSIS CHARTS

## Key to Symbols for Appendix B

G: Giver

O: Object

R: Receiver

H: Helper

S: Subject

Opp: Opposition

**Preacher:** Barbara      **Sermon Title:** Against All Odds (2010)

**Scripture:** II Chronicles 20: 1-7, 22-23

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: Life as a Christian does not exclude us from trials and tribulations (ln 18-20), scary situations (ln 27-28)</li> <li>• H: Advocate fighting for us/Jesus (ln 34-35)</li> <li>• G: sovereign God (28-29);</li> <li>• O: Strength and testimony through trial (ln 31-32)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: fear to stand up (ln 59-63); If we keep hush God gets no glory (ln 64); the enemy who comes in like a flood (ln 69-70)</li> <li>• G: a God that cannot fail (ln 64); declare the goodness of the Lord and watch God move on your behalf (ln 76-77)</li> <li>• H: God will lift up a standard against him (the enemy); Word of God (ln 71-75)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H: Prayer</li> <li>• O: victory, an out, answers (ln 82-86)</li> <li>• G: God who answers (ln 83); God is with us (ln 95)</li> <li>• Opp: the wrong positioning (ln 87-89)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H: praise, your praise confuses the enemy (ln 102-104)</li> <li>• O: sweet reward – a prize for not fighting (it may be peace) (ln 146-150)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>  Deductive/ Assertive through delineation of truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He (king Jehoshaphat) would encourage us to go to God as our first resort and not our last. (ln 49-51)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should we do if we are against all odds? -stand up! (ln 56) &amp; stand on the word of God (ln 65)</li> <li>• Stand up and declare the goodness of the Lord and watch God move on your behalf. (ln 76-77)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should we do if we are against all odds? – stand still (ln 79)</li> <li>• We have to just standstill in the area of righteousness. (ln 89)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should we do if we are against all odds? –start singing (ln 100)</li> <li>• Need to put the focus on God and not the problem (ln 110)</li> <li>• After you have stand (stood) up against the enemy and stand still in battle, it’s time to start singing.</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Here comes a tattle tale...Jehoshaphat receives notices that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• verse 5 Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• verse 17 –you don’t have to fight this battle...stand firm and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• verse 22 says “as they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	<p>his enemies are approaching and greatly outnumber him (ln 21-25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The story/history of King Jehoshaphat from chapters 17 -19 (ln 39-48)</li> </ul>	<p>Judah...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jehoshaphat speaks in faith (ln 65-69)</li> <li>Word of God/scriptural answers to issues of life: Wealth and riches are in my house; I've never seen the righteous forsaken or begging for bread; the Lord shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory. (ln 71-75)</li> </ul>	<p>see the deliverance of the Lord will give you.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The word tells us in verse 17b not be afraid or discouraged because God is with us (ln 95)</li> </ul>	<p>Ammon and Moab...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once Jehoshaphat’s army saw that their enemies were defeated...the army went in...the bible say, that they had so much it took three days to haul it away (ln 141-145)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Twisters in the nations Midwest and interviews with locals (ln 10-14)</li> <li>Tattle tales of real life: Girl, I heard...bad news can travel around the world twice before good news can make it out the neighborhood (ln 23-25)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issues of life: null and void bank accounts, mechanical breakdowns, financial needs (ln 71-75)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The wrong positioning, purchasing lottery tickets for financial security (ln 87-89)</li> <li>The guards outside of Buckingham palace standing still not moving (ln 91-94)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That’s what a good praise song will do... it takes the focus off the bills, the spouse acting crazy, and puts things in perspective (ln 110-111)</li> <li>Celebration/close: through song “Awesome wonder” (ln 1113-134)</li> <li>It took them three days to haul it all away...they had to call in extra cousins and pick up trucks (ln 144)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Barbara

**Sermon Title:** Are You Ready to Come to the Table (2011)

**Scripture:** I Corinthians 11: 17-34

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G: God as redeemer</li> <li>O: Redemption; life abundant</li> <li>R: Sinner /sin-sick-soul</li> <li>H: prayers of mama and grandma, life/death of Jesus</li> <li>(ln 54-61)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opp: unworthy manner, self-seeking, arrogant/ce (ln 111-12)</li> <li>G: God invites</li> <li>H: mercy</li> <li>S: we and our sinful selves</li> <li>S: the communion table is the believers table (ln 116-119)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>God will point out everything He does not like (ln 145-146)</li> <li>Let God correct you so that we are new creatures every time we come to the table (ln 149-53)</li> <li>Everything can change at the table only if you ask(ln 166)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>  Deductive/ Assertive through delineation of truth problem/ solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our ideology of communion has been watered down to be synonymous with a snack...with the wafer and juice...and not the ultimate sacrifice. (ln 53-54)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We too are struggling to find our identity as a church among a bustling society. (ln 74-75)</li> <li>-often times we want to point fingers at the biblical characters we read about. But in actuality they represent us.</li> <li>The church today is confused about communion. I would dare to say we need to re-evaluate how we view this sacrament. (ln 90-92)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The dangers of misunderstanding the Lord's Supper are serious; we are guilty of sinning against the Lord's sacrifice; we reap judgment on our lives. (ln 106-109;125)</li> <li>We as believers, who profess Christ as our savior, should not come to the table jokingly or simply focusing on the elements, but rather focusing on the sacrifice that kept you from entering into eternal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Before we come to the table God says take an inward look at yourself. Take time to reflect on your struggles. (ln 144-46)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
			separation from God. (ln 119-121)	
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul was saying to the Corinthians “hold up, you’ve got this communion thing all wrong!” there was a misunderstanding of the Lord’s Supper (ln 36-44)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exegesis: Paul’s letter written to the Corinthian Church . Corinthians struggling to find identity amongst a bustling city of immorality, pagan rituals, etc. (ln 65-75 )</li> <li>Paul got word that the Corinthians were showing off again! The Corinthians had brought in their worldly thinking and instituted divisions at the Lord’s Table (ln 77-78)</li> <li>-Paul iterates that this is a shared meal (ln 83-84)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-(v.27) whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. (ln 108-111)</li> <li>(v.29) many of them were weak and sick, some have fallen to sleep- a spiritual death, (ln 125-128)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-(v31) for if we searchingly examined ourselves...we should not be judged...come in holy awe (ln 141-42;155)</li> <li>The lady with the issue of blood was healed because of the way she approached the table; “healing is the children’s bread (ln 159-66)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The routine of first Sunday communion (ln 15-26)</li> <li>The preacher’s experience as a communications professor (ln 27-32) (could be her way of est. credibility)</li> <li>Out of routine- often times we come to the table in the wrong manner; Thanksgiving dinner (ln</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The problematic of the millennial church ; the Christian church is trying to be relevant in a world that has called it irrelevant (ln 99-101)</li> <li>And we, just like the Corinthians have taken a critical sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ himself and have watered down its significance. (ln</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kept when you didn’t want to be kept; sinking so deep in sin (ln 123-4)</li> <li>Andre Crouch wrote: I don’t know why Jesus loves me (song) (ln 135-136)</li> </ul> <p><b>(Problem Sequence)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People don’t go to the dentist/doctor because they don’t want to be examined. (ln 147-48)</li> <li>Grandmother would fast on first Sundays. She said the first thing she wanted in her body was the body of Christ...</li> <li>-Jesus body bruised for your marriage, suffered and bled so your family</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	34-41; 45-51) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's month and knowing the process of preparing for a wedding (ln 25-26)</li> </ul>	101-103)		could recover from old wounds (ln 162-65) <b>(Solution Sequence)</b>

**Preacher:** Barbara

**Sermon Title:** Shaken for A Purpose (2011)

**Scripture:** Haggai 2: 1-9

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: the cluttering things of this world.</li> <li>• R: the church, individual believers (ln 55-56)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• O: strength</li> <li>• H: trials and tribulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G: God sender of peace, glory and tribulation</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>  Deductive/ Assertive through delineation of truth questions/ answers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buildings are not the dwelling places God desires to inhabit. God desires to dwell in us, His church. (ln 55)</li> <li>• The shaking occurs so that all that is made or created by man is removed and only the unshakable remains. ...the unshakeable that is left is the kingdom of God. (ln 77-9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God is allowing the shaking to go on for a reason... God is shaking the church so he can clean it up. (ln 94-5;98)</li> <li>• God is allowing us to go through trials and tribulations to make us stronger. (ln 101)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the shaking is going on you should be strong and work. (ln 121-128)</li> <li>• God will shake the earth once again (foreshadowing of the coming of the Kingdom)(158-9)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instability and devastation: the people of Judah arriving back after being captive in Babylon for approx. 70 years (ln 35-39)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lord chastised the people of Judah for allowing His temple to fall down while their well-to-do homes were adorned...(ln 41-42)</li> <li>• God tell Haggai to ask the people three questions “who remembers the temple in its former glory?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v7 God says, I will shake all the nations, and the desired of all nations will come and I will fill this house with glory. When you see desired in this scripture it means Jesus (ln 83-86)</li> <li>• Ro 5 We glory in tribulations also: knowing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The glory of the present house would be great than the glory of the former house (v 4-9) (line 121-8)</li> <li>• God said he would fill the temple with his glory (ln 152-4)</li> <li>• Ps 1:3- God will never</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
		How does it look now? It looks like nothing?" (ln 42-53)	that that tribulation worketh patience (ln 101-105)	leave you
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instability in the earth and life</li> <li>• -7.0 earthquake in Haiti, Asked God, "why did the devastation have to happen to these people?" (ln 14-18)</li> <li>• California earthquake that affected the lives of people she knew (ln 21-14)</li> <li>• Sumatra, India earthquake 7.9 (ln 26)</li> <li>• Like Marvin Gaye, "what's going on?"</li> <li>• Instability in our lives, economy, stock market, layoffs, gas prices (ln 31-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jerusalem better home and gardens, chem-lawn, 3.5 bath rancher and 3 mule garage (ln 43+45)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• things seem topsy turvy in everyday life (ln 88-92)</li> <li>• God pulling the covers off of pastors, ministers, and church members etc....(ln 101-105)</li> <li>• If you haven't read your bible lately and compared it to the local and national news headlines, we're living in the last days. (94-96)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of us are sitting down on what God told us to do. (ln 123-7)</li> <li>• Lyrics of "we shall behold him" Dottie Rambo and Commissioned (ln 161-73)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Louise

**Sermon Title:** God’s Plan - Postponement and Reconciliation (2011)

**Scripture:** John 11:1-45

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Jesus who is the God and death and life beyond death...(ln 16-7)</li> <li>G: God</li> <li>O: Plan</li> <li>R: God’s People</li> <li>Opp: Delay</li> <li>The expectation of an imminent God who anoints and intervenes (ln 38-45)</li> <li>Jesus as one who does things counter-culturally, and sinless, doing things in unexpected ways that lead to eternal life (ln 47-53)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>H: God on your side</li> <li>S: doing what pleases God</li> <li>Opp: Delay, confusing delay with denial</li> <li>O: Reconciliation</li> <li>od has a plan for our lives (ln 57)</li> <li>God has you on the radar screen and whatever it is that you want to do that pleases God, God is on your side. I believe that God is expecting our actions to align with the word of the Lord, but He also wants it to be our will. (ideals of God’s plan/will and our desired will being in partnership- a God who considers out desires) (ln 75-80)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That which is asleep in Jesus can only be awakened in Jesus (ln 93-4)</li> <li>S: reconciliation</li> <li>Opp: humanity steeped in sin, “binding”/grave clothes</li> <li>H: Jesus the Great I Am</li> <li>Jesus calls our names and knows each of us by name (intimacy) (ln 122-30)</li> </ul>	
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>....I have come to you this morning with a word from the Lord. (assertive understanding of her task) (ln 4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delay is not Denial (ln 55-57) *there will be a time of reconciliation (ln 82-91)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>God’s Plan is being done for us through the Reconciliation of the many issues that plague our lives (ln 112-3)</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Though Jesus Loves us, He does not always move on our time schedule. (ln 36)</li> </ul>			
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Account for the story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (ln 8-13)</li> <li>Jesus' postponed response to Mary and Martha (ln 30-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus asking the man at the pool "do you want to be made well?"; ask and it shall be given, seek and ye shall find ...Matt 7:7-8 (ln 77+80)</li> <li>Jesus goes back to attend to Lazarus, Mary, &amp; Martha (ln 82-91)</li> <li>Jesus is Son of God and has revelatory powers (ln 82-91)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus tells the disciples Lazarus is asleep and challenged by Martha (ln 93-6)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defining postponement as found in the daily life world – fed gov shutdown (ln 20-9)</li> <li>Expectation that closeness to God equals Jesus solving our problems (ln 38-42)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delay is denial for the federal government recent debates; AA woman reluctant to reveal her identity with her merchandise for fear of denial (ln 55-73)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The experience and pain of death in our lives, and hope in belief in Jesus Christ ln 93-104)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Louise

**Sermon Title:** God’s Plan- Handling Temptation (2011)

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:1-11

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: Spiritual Discipline</li> <li>Opp: Temptation as alluring and pleasurable, Satan; wilderness</li> <li>H: strategies that help us overcome temptation, prayer</li> <li>Jesus being prepared by God to live in the midst of things that seem to ensnare and trap us (Jesus never had doubt in his mind, and simply handled it)- human and fully Divine (ln 60-74)</li> <li>Temptation is not sin (ln 76-83)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus was the son of God and all the power belonged to him, yet he was not willing to succumb to the power play of the devil (ln 91-93)</li> <li>The power belongs to God and God gives it to the faint (ln 103-8)</li> <li>G: God</li> <li>O: Power</li> <li>R: Xns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opp: shortcuts, worldly materialism; the enemy</li> <li>S: sharing in the glory of God; defeating the enemy</li> <li>H: Jesus who rescues us from ourselves</li> <li>And there are no shortcuts to the will of God. If we want to share in his glory, we must share in his suffering. (ln 145-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We may need to speak a word of our lives in song, in Scripture and in Spiritual psalms, God will move in your life and you through God’s word we have the power to defeat the enemy (ln 156-7)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>  Deductive/ Assertive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When you face your great temptation, search the Scripture for a word that will apply and begin to speak the word over your life... We have to handle our weaknesses (ln 87-9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have to handle our power (ln 91-2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have to handle idolatry (ln 131-3)</li> </ul>	
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Jesus led to the wilderness for forty days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus did not succumb to the devil by displaying his</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Satan trying to get the Son of God to worship him (ln</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	(ln 14-8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus uses the word of God to fight temptation ; temptation is inevitable (85-87)</li> </ul>	power (ln 91-99) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The power belongs to God and God gives it to the faint, Matt 28:16- Isa 40:29 (ln 103-8)</li> <li>the devil using a variation of the word on Jesus, but Jesus resisting</li> </ul>	132-9) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus spoke the final word from Deut. 6:13 (ln 148-54)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The time of lent (church calendar) (ln 20-49)</li> <li>Temptation in our lives (ln 31-53)</li> <li>Temptation like fishing bait (ln 76-83)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expert witness: Baron Acton made the statement “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Back in my younger days there was a perfume commercial, that I suppose was in response to the Women’s Rights Movement and it was very popular, “... (ln 96-101)</li> <li>The ways we give away our power to other people bosses, spouses, children, etc. (ln 119-130)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Idolatry is worshipping false Gods (definition) (ln 132-3)</li> <li>We get caught up in materialism in this world. (ln 141-6)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Louise

**Sermon Title:** Trusting God in Trying Times (2011)

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:24-34

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we are all connected and need a God we can trust (ln 14-6)</li> <li>S: trusting God</li> <li>Opp: trying times</li> <li>H: hope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: true spirituality, the right attitude towards wealth, serving God, worshipping God, loving God</li> <li>Opp: serving money, sufficiency without God</li> <li>G: God the creator O: Power R: the weak</li> <li>God is the Creator of all the ends of the earth, God neither faints nor grows weary. There is no searching of God's understanding. God gives power to the faith and to those who have no might, God increases their strength. We need God. We need an anchor that will hold us, because storms are certain to rise in our lives. (ln 71-74, 84-94)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opp: worry, control</li> <li>S: trusting God,</li> <li>I believe that is a God who wants to provide for us and has given us promises about even the desires of our hearts. (ln 133)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opp: fear</li> <li>S: Xns, making the choice to trust God</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b> <b>Deductive/</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the midst of troubling times, we need a God in whom we can Trust (ln 17-8)... Somehow I suspect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It begins with a choice. It is as if though Jesus is calling us to accountability. It all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus is saying to us today, do not worry.(ln 115)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If we want to make in these trying times, we are going to have to step out of our comfort zones and</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Assertive</b>	<p>that our Savior who cares so much about the plight of his people would want me to encourage each of us to be vigilant, and do not doubt, but trust in the word of the Lord. (ln 37-49)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She tends to have an “immediate” word/message- as in in this very moment God is saying</li> </ul>	<p>begins with Choice. Jesus wants us to get it right, it is not that God does not want us to have wealth, but he wants us to have the right attitude toward to wealth, because it is the mark of true spirituality. (ln 41-5)</p>		<p>begin to trust (ln 166-7)</p>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus preaching and teaching about how the people of God are to live in community (ln 29)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v.24 serving two masters (God and Money) (ln 41)</li> <li>• Jesus is speaking into this emerging church that it is impossible to serve two masters...(ln 47-52)</li> <li>• Goes behind the text to explore the meaning of mammon (ln 53-66)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psalm 37:4 “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Ps. 37:19, “in times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.” Ps 37:34, “Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.” (ln 133-8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek first, the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness and all these things, what things, whatever your heart desires. (ln 160-1)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying times in America, in our world: job loss, celebrity disasters, children not receiving proper education, (ln 4-18)</li> <li>• Defining Trust (ln 20-27)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “the hard sayings of the bible” –expert witness to dig behind and explain the text/her point (ln 53-66)</li> <li>• Many in the world feel themselves as sufficient without God...(ln 68-74)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worrying about aging parents/parents worrying about children (ln 101-14)</li> <li>• defining worry (ln 117-127)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close: He has a proven track record that he has never lost a single one who has come to trust in him... He died on the cross of Calvary. I’m so glad that he did it just for you, just for me. He went down in</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
				death to take captive everything that could hold you captive so that when he rose all of us could be free. (ln 167-75)

**Preacher:** Louise

**Sermon Title:** Don't Faint on the Journey (2011)

**Scripture:** Romans 5:1-5

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>by faith through grace we continue to stay on the journey (ln 6, 73)</li> <li>S: not fainting/persevering on the journey (ln 21);</li> <li>Opp: Difficult times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: participating in our acceptance of JC (ln 73-86); access to God</li> <li>G: Christ, God</li> <li>O: peace with God, grace, unconditional love</li> <li>R: Xns, believers</li> <li>H: X</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I want you to be assured that we should rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. It doesn't stop there, be we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance. In other words, we press on, even when we have to suffer because we know that God is about to do a far greater work in and through us. (ln 130-3)</li> <li>H: hope/spirit living in us/(ln 140-8)</li> </ul>	
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we win if we do not faint on the journey (ln 21-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through Christ we have access - right of entry, admission, entrée, admittance, our right to use this unmerited favor in our lives. (ln 101-2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>life will not be easy, but the Lord is going to make a way for you. (ln 126)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't Faint on the Journey, you are going to need faith, grace and the power of love. Christ died to make it possible for you. (ln 166-7)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul wanted to communicated to the church of Rome that they have peace with God (ln 64-5)</li> <li>key verse of the book of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Philippians 1:6, " He who has begun a great work in us will see it to completion."(ln 133-4)</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
		<p>Romans, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”(ln 70-1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul understanding access to grace because of conversion in Acts 9 (ln 113-23)</li> </ul>		
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the difficulty of the journey over the past year, but looking back and “wondering how we made it” (ln 9-12)</li> <li>• Canton Spirituals: on my way home (ln 27-36)</li> <li>• Mary J. Blige’s testimony in Soul of My Sisters (ln 38-49)</li> <li>• -Church Calendar - Pentecost Sunday (ln 51-62)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to the internet/world wide web/electricity/power... (ln 103-111)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athletic coach analogies of not fainting Vivian Stringer and Tony Dungy- (she makes it a point to balance her male/female examples) (ln 150-164)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Louise

**Sermon Title:** Bourne Identity (2011)

**Scripture:** Acts 17:22-31

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S: Purpose/borne Identity</li> <li>• Opp: bad choices</li> <li>• H: Damascus Road Experience/change</li> <li>• O: purpose R: Xns/non-believers</li> <li>• But we serve a God who is concerned about us. And when it appears that God’s church is about to be destroyed, God moves by God’s own power and takes control. (ln 61-2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S: bold witness for God/X, courageous witness</li> <li>• H: Jesus who lives among us</li> <li>• Jesus has come to live among us...He is the one that we crucified on a cross and he is the one who has been raised. Because he got up, the world can get up. Yes, we can have our lives back. (ln 108-12)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S: our identity/new life/children of God</li> <li>• G: X /God the Creator</li> <li>• O: Identity/ image of God</li> <li>• R: followers/believers</li> <li>• Opp: darkness</li> <li>• God is calling to us, a people who are estranged from God, yet we never know how the grace of God operates to reconnect us with our Creator.(ln 121-2)</li> </ul>	
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have to come to remind us that as each of us were born into this world with our own individualist identity and we have the indelible print of our maker, Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (ln 41-2)</li> <li>• I believe that when a real change comes in our lives, God makes it so plain that even the vilest of disbelievers will change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our God is seeking bold witnesses who are willing to step out in the deep water in our faith and tell somebody about what the Lord has done for you. (ln 101-2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our identity is intrinsically bound within the one we choose to follow. (ln 115)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let’s take it to the streets! We can get our identity back. ... (ln 129)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	and come over on the Lords' side. (ln 73-4)			
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the writer of the text today was living life as he believed that he was supposed to until he was confronted and called to make a change. The Apostle Paul... young CEO of the church in Jerusalem...Damascus Road experience (ln 47-74)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul takes it to the market place and speaks of the true and living God ... (ln 76-112)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gen 1:27 –the image of God (ln 115-6)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The movie Borne Identity- Jason through an encounter begins to come into his real self. (ln 1-10)</li> <li>Bourne having double meaning- being in transition on the boundary. We all have something within us/goals that we want to accomplish become/born to be... (ln 12-31)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>God will use those witnesses who are bold enough to say I believe in God and step out with the philosophers of this world who are willing to tell you what they don't believe about Jesus, are we courageous enough to tell them what we believe about God. (ln 102-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jason Borne had something stir in his conscience... (ln 124-130)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Louise

**Sermon Title:** A Servant's Praise for Her God (2011)

**Scripture:** Psalm 34:1-8

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opp: difficult times</li><li>• S: praising God</li><li>• H: recalling the burning bush,</li><li>• G: God</li><li>• O: Mission</li><li>• R: Believer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• S: doing the will of God, praising God</li><li>• H: God's protective wing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• S: transformation</li><li>• Opp: easy road of destruction</li><li>• H: prayer</li><li>• There is need for the new believer and sometimes the longer term member to realize that when we come to Jesus Christ, we have to be willing to die to ourselves so that we can live for Christ. (ln 95-00)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• S: trusting God</li></ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You must recall the time that God called your name to carry forth his powerful word. It is imperative that you once again reflect on the joy that was in your heart when you first ran forth to the Lord saying, Lord whatever it is that you want me to do, send me. (ln 29-32)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ... we bless the Lord at all times because God is good (ln 90)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are some things that we will pray our way through (ln 91)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• God wants to share what your situation is and wants you to know that all things are possible, to those who believe and will trust him. (ln 120-121)</li></ul>
<b>Engaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In review of the commentaries, Ps 34 –</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I suppose that why David is speaks to us, I sought</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• And finally this afternoon, the psalmist invites us to</li></ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Scripture</b>	David had knowledge of trying times...his experience running from Saul... (ln 50-5)	continually be in my mouth (ln 57-72)	the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. I want to propose that David was going to the Lord in prayer. (ln 102-4)  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can take all things to the Lord in prayer and the God of peace who surpasses our own understanding will keep his heart and mind stayed on us. (ln 113-4)</li> </ul>	“O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who trust him. (ln 123-4)
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiences in our present life when the “burning bush” has stopped burned...women in ministry...friends stop calling, etc. (ln 7-40)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gathering together in worship and praise of God, as opposed to complain (ln 74-88)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give me the right words to say as I approach this individual. Lord hold my hand and my tongue in the decision making process. Guide my feet and hold my hands as I attempt to lead your people in the way that you would have us to go. I heard the Apostle Paul saying, the effectual fervent prayers of the righteous avails much. The hymn writer would have said it this way, No let us have a little talk with Jesus, let us tell him all about our troubles... (ln 104-11)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close: Feast on the word...(ln 129-36)</li> </ul>



**Preacher:** Louise

**Sermon Title:** It's Your Choice (2011)

**Scripture:** Luke 15:11-32

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: Believers, making the right choices</li> <li>God is not so concerned about those that are in the house as He is about those who have wandered away, by their own choice. (ln 16-17)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G: God</li> <li>O: desires of our heart</li> <li>R: Xns/Children of God</li> <li>God makes us aware that we can ask for anything that we want, for the word of the Lord tells us to ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to us. (ln 58-60)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G: God</li> <li>O: unconditional love</li> <li>R: children of God</li> <li>S: repentance</li> <li>H: Grace that helps us in weakness</li> <li>When you love like Jesus loves, punishment is not necessary, your forgiveness has already been paid in full. Jesus wants us to just come. Just come...(ln 138-143)</li> </ul>	
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We a have a choice... The choice really is in our hands. (ln 10-1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The father teaches us that we should give, but never give up. (ln 37)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Young Son has a message for us, Be care how you use it, you could lose it. (ln 63)</li> <li>We are invited to remember that like the prodigal son, who was extravagant and uncontrolled, we can still get up and go home to the father. (ln 105-7)</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In a series of Scripture just prior to this story, Jesus shares stories about lost things. The Lost Sheep... The Lost Coin, ... And now the story is about a lost son. (ln 10-23)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We find in this story a good father who loves his children, both of them...(ln 37-61)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For this young man followed the pattern of those who often get too much too soon. Armed with all of the worldly possessions, he took off for the far country...(ln 63-98)</li> <li>Expanding the story of the reunion between father and son (ln 118-36)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarifying the terms: defining choice (ln 4-8)</li> <li>Preacher's experience in Boston, MA watching a homeless individual wondering whose/what choices led to this situation (ln 25-34)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The prodigal son's story retold with present day substitutes for how he squandered his inheritance (ln 63-82)</li> <li>Our present day squandering on condos, etc.... (ln 100-109)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Patricia

**Sermon Title:** No Title (2011)

**Scripture:** Genesis 17: 1-7

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salvation is free but you have to work at it. (ln 41-45)</li> <li>• G: God</li> <li>• O: promise/covenant (ln 34-35)</li> <li>• R: believers/Christians</li> <li>• S: righteous living, walking before God (ln 15,34-37)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: getting caught up in ourselves/situations (ln 51)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know that God has promised me the victory. (ln 96)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What God says is law, what he says he is certain and it is a promise because he will not break his word.</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order for God to bless you, you have to walk in the commandments of God. (ln 37)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We get so caught up in our situations, that we forget God’s promises. (ln 51,64)..You should have the assurance that what God has for you, is for you. (ln 70)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circumstances, people, and Satan cannot keep you down because God has your back. What is going on around you is not as important as what is going on the inside of you. (ln 110-1)</li> <li>• You must build your faith, you must speak those things as if they exist, you must say it over and over, nice and loud. (ln 123-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new promise God gave all of us is agreement God has made with mankind, based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (ln 134-5)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (v. 1, 2-7) when Abram was 99 years old the Lord</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abraham laughed and forgot what God told him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like the Word says, we MUST lay a side every</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romans 10:9</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Scripture</b>	<p>appeared to Abram and said unto him I am the Almighty God...G was guaranteeing Abram a blameless life...letting Abram know that when you walk right and live a righteous life before God, that you can be perfect (ln 9-30)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go was making a covenant or promise with Abram that he will bless his life .as long as he walk(ed) before the Lord (ln 28-32)</li> </ul>	<p>(Gen 15-17) (ln 51)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>remember the Israelites...they go sidetracked by forgetting the promise God told them...Ex 3:17(ln 72-83)</li> <li>Like the Word says, we MUST lay a side every weight that so easily besets us. (ln 92)</li> </ul>	<p>weight that so easily besets us...I am happy to know that from the Bible - that whatever I go through I know it is just temporary – ..It is only for a season because I know that God has promised me the victory. (ln 92-96)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me (ln 104)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved (ln 136-8)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>So often God will take you out of an old tired situation and you can't seem to accept the new situation God has given you. (ln 85-6)</li> <li>We tend to hang on to things that are preventing us from walking in the promises of God. (ln 90)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A couple of people came to me and said they didn't understand when one of our members used to say "God's got it", and then the member passed away. (ln 111-3)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Patricia

**Sermon Title:** No Title (God in the Midst of the Fire, 2011)

**Sermon Text:** Exodus 3

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R; Xns</li> <li>• S: Holy Place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No matter what, God is an on time God...He may not come when you want him to, but he is always on time. (ln 41-43)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -God is calling you to “Get right with God, and do it now.” (ln 61)</li> <li>• Opp: attacks</li> <li>• G: a present God</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We all have a purpose you must know that God wants to use you. (ln 98)</li> <li>• Talk about Holy Ground – Holy means to be set apart from the world, to be sacred, to be righteous...(ln 104)</li> <li>• You should be able to feel the presence of the Lord ...the Lord is IN THIS PLACE...(ln 121-122)(the preacher uses an imminent presence with a removed presence)</li> <li>• O: direction, S: following Gods’ direction</li> <li>• Opp: unrighteousness G: A Holy God</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So often we need to be led to the mountain – a place where God can have your attention. (ln 7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God appears at an unexpected time, in an unexpected way. (ln 39)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God is in the midst of every situation that you are in...(ln 81)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to be prepared for how God is going to direct you...(ln 92)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v(1) Moses was tending</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v(2) &amp; (3) Moses saw that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When God saw that Moses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read (5) &amp; (6) God was</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Scripture</b>	<p>the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, and led the flock to the backside of the desert and then he came to the mountain of Horeb which means a mountain of God. (In 5-6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 10 commandments were given on the mountain. (In 19)</li> <li>• Psalms 30:7 – Thou has made my mountain to stand strong, even when I hid my face and I was in trouble. (In 27-8)</li> </ul>	<p>the bush was burning but he couldn't understand why it was burning up or being consumed. Mark 10:27 - With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. Moses walked closer to the bush – He couldn't understand the Magnitude of God. (In 30-35)</p>	<p>was getting closer – God called unto Moses twice – Moses, Moses from the midst of the fire to make sure that he was getting Moses attention. God even called Saul twice on the road to Damascus when he was trying to get his attention. (In 54-59)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the bible Fire is connected to... ..(In 65*69)</li> </ul>	<p>telling Moses not to move any closer, take off your shoes because you are standing on holy ground... (In 89-90) God was giving Moses a purpose and direction...(96)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brings me back to the story of Ananias (husband) and Sapphira (wife)...(In 127-129)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mountain is considered a holy place where God can lead you...a place where it is just you and God... confined place where you don't have to look at sister so and so or brother so and so. It is just you and God. (In 13-19)</li> <li>• Even when MLK was in Memphis – He said that he didn't know what was going to happen to him but he knew tough times were a head, But it didn't matter, because he had been to the mountaintop.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It brings me to the hymn... Just a closer walk with thee (In 47-52)</li> <li>• Many of us are using our human eyes and not our spiritual eyes to see things. (In 37)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ... Webster tells us that Fire means to be - Under physical or verbal attack ...Some of you are under attack and are against the wall, and don't know if you should go left or right or should you move forward. (In 71-76)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why come to church every Sunday, sit on the pews, sing, dance, put money in the pans and don't change and be converted and lose your soul...(In 110-122)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	(ln 25-6)			

**Preacher:** Patricia

**Sermon Title:** No Title (God in the Midst of the Fire, 2011) cont....

**Scripture:** Exodus 3

	Sequence 5	Sequence 6	Sequence 7	Sequence 8
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People give you assistance but God gives you help ... Jesus is the source of my Joy – He is the one when I feel like I can't make it another step – He comes right on in and gives me a push...He is the one that protects me – when I am driving ... He is the one that multiplies my money (even though I haven't worked in two years). (ln 160-70)</li> <li>• H: Jesus and God O: Help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are a child of God!! .You are royalty!!! You are the King's kid. (ln 203-5)</li> </ul>		
<b>Conveying Truth</b>				
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v7-9 (150) I have indeed seen the misery of my people...</li> </ul>			
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a time in my life, when I was depressed ...</li> <li>• God is a healer- God is a way maker</li> <li>• God is a lawyer -God is all-knowing</li> <li>• Is there anything too hard for God?...There is nothing too</li> </ul>			

	Sequence 5	Sequence 6	Sequence 7	Sequence 8
	<p>big</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing too small</li> <li>• Nothing too wide</li> <li>• Nothing too tall that he can't fixed</li> <li>• My God, My God...I feel my strength coming – I feel a praise (In 174-226) close/celebration (the tradition)</li> </ul>			

**Preacher:** Patricia

**Sermon Title:** No Title (2011)

**Scripture:** Psalm 40: 1-5

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: giving up</li> <li>• S: waiting on the Lord</li> <li>• O: deliverance, answer from God</li> <li>• G: God</li> <li>• R: Xns/Believers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: Sin/the pit, discouragement</li> <li>• H: Jesus as the ONLY one who can save you and bring you out of a Pit of hell and destruction (ln 81-2); opening your new eyes</li> <li>• There is a lot of slipping and sliding when it comes to staying saved, because people are not standing on the foundation of God. A solid and firm foundation. (ln 86-7)</li> <li>• Satan is trying to sink you into the Pit – trying to take your joy, trying to take you excitement for the Lord. (ln 103)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G: God</li> <li>• O: New Song</li> <li>• R: Xns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S: testifying</li> <li>• Opp: forgetting</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But I am here to tell you that God did not forget you – He said in his Word he will never leave you nor forsake you. Wait on the Lord. (ln 39-40)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But it is up to you to give God your hand (put your hand out) and let him lead you....(ln 112)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God will put a new song in your mouth (ln 114)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a good thing to talk about our experience of when we were transformed (or changed), it is dangerous when we forget when God brought you out of the pit. (ln 146-7)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (1) David said he waited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v2 God did three things</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v3 he put a new song in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v5 many are the wonders</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Scripture</b>	<p>patiently for the Lord (ln 2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>And David waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto him, and God heard David's cry. Hold on.(ln 59)</li> </ul>	<p>here... (1) Brought David out of a pit (2) Set his feet upon a rock (a firm foundation) And established his goings (set him on the right track)...(ln 63-65)</p>	<p>my mouth</p>	<p>you have done (ln 142)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scripture as celebration (Ps 23) (ln 172-183)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like David, we feel that we can make decisions in our life without consulting God, and all we do it just make our life A BIG MESS!!! (ln 24-5)</li> <li>You are sitting there wondering how, where, and when is God going to bring you out!!! ...</li> <li>You may think that God has forgot about you, ....(ln 31-7)</li> <li>The saints used to tarry...(ln 42-54)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let's go back to pit – A Pit can be defined as sin, destruction, being in an unpleasant place or situation...ln 67-79</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sing songs like – What a friend we have in Jesus... Troubles in my way, I had to cry sometimes, But I knew Jesus will fix it after while. A song like - I won't complain – I had some good days, and I had some bad days – But all of my good days outweigh my bad. My favorite ... Yes, I know what it means to live holy... Yes, I know what it means to suffer, Oh it means eternal life. (ln 128-42)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I know someone close to me, for 9 years dealing with frustration, anger, heartaches, disappointments, and just stressed out. ...She prayed for many years, asking God to help her to COME OUT OF THE PIT of depression... God made a way for her ... (ln 151-157)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Patricia

**Sermon Title:** No Title (Easter 2011)

**Scripture:** Luke 23:1-3

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opp: Misinterpreting the word of God</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• R: Children of God, Xns</li><li>• Opp: The need to prove things to people</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• S: the perfect man (Jesus), unconverted</li><li>• O: salvation, life</li><li>• *Jesus had victory over the Grave</li><li>• Sometimes you have to suffer in order for good to come out of your life.</li><li>• Often times you have to suffer for righteous sake</li><li>• Often times you must go through something to bad to appreciate the good (ln 86-92)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How often here who killed Jesus? Nobody killed Jesus, THEY DIDN'T TAKE JESUS LIFE, Jesus GAVE HIS LIFE (ln 162)</li></ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• So often we misinterpret the Word of God to fit our situation. (ln 24)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Just like our Christian walk, our lights should shine so bright that someone will be able to say – You are a child of God. (v42-4)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is important that I talk about the Perfect Man on Today. Some of you I haven't seen in a long time, so it is a great opportunity for me to talk about and introduce such a Perfect man, named Jesus. (ln 47-8) (Evangelism)</li><li>• God will do the rest – you are not going to be perfect when u come to Christ.</li></ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
			However, you are committing to God that you believe in him and want to know him. (ln 159-61)	
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v2 And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.</li> <li>They accused Jesus and Jesus’s earlier teaching proved this wasn’t true (ln 5-22)</li> <li>Matthew 22:29 you do , not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v3 If that’s what you say, let it be? (ln 28)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The story of Jesus’ crucifixion, suffering, and humiliation (no immediate scripture references) (ln 68-75; 106-113)</li> <li>Ro 10:9 confess with your mouth believe with your heart (ln 156-7)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sometimes you feel that you have to prove things to people. Let them believe what they want to believe. You are wasting too much energy in time. (ln 29-34)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can’t lose with Jesus; With Jesus it is 100% satisfaction guaranteed.; He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the beginning and the end; He is a healer; He is doctor; He is a lawyer in a court room ; He is everything you need (ln 51-64)</li> <li>Celebration/Close- Hymn:</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
			Because He lives (ln 136-152); (ln 136 -184)	

**Preacher:** Patricia      **Sermon Title:** No Title

**Scripture:** Genesis 4: 1-7, 50,

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G: God</li> <li>O: blessing, favor</li> <li>R: Xns, believers</li> <li>Opp: Short changing God; holding back what we can really do</li> <li>S: being blessed by God</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opp: other people/set ups</li> <li>Obj: spirit of Discernment</li> <li>G: God</li> <li>S: discernment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G: all knowing God</li> <li>S: believers, helping others</li> <li>IT WAS GOD WHO CAIN WAS TALKING TO. ALL-KNOWING GOD. Who was he fooling?(ln 44-5)</li> <li>The kingdom of God is within us. Our lights should shine so bright. People should be able to say – there is something special about that person...(ln 71-2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People will strip you and try to break you down. But God is your provider, God will make ways out of know way, God can deliver you from anything. (ln 144-6)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oftentimes we shortchange God, and we put him last. Then we wonder why we are still dealing with mess for years. (ln 33-34)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As Christians, we need to ask God for a spirit of discernment. (ln 39)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serving God means you can't help but serve others (ln 70)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be careful who you are envious of? You don't their story!!!! (ln 132)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Genesis 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter 1 – 7 –Adam and Eve had 2 sons, Cain and Abel gave offerings to God.... Cain began to get disturbed, VERY upset, and angry (ln</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v8 As I did research on this verse, it was mentioned that Cain talked to Abel to get him to come in the field with him. (ln 35-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v9- 10 Cain had the nerve to reply to God with a sarcastic question to God after Cain knew indeed he killed his brother, instead of admitting it...(ln 43-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the story of Joseph (ln 127-70)</li> <li>Jesus as a brother's keeper on the cross(close/celebration) (ln</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	16-21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...The Word says to abstain or stay away from the very appearance of evil...(ln 40)</li> </ul>	44) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can was jealous o Abel (ln 88-9)</li> <li>Mark 12:28-31 - And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (ln 99-100)</li> </ul>	176-9)
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>people say I am not mad and I don't have an attitude, but you can see there demeanor changing, their tone of voice...(ln 22-3)</li> <li>Like Cain, often people are upset at a sister or brother having favor or being blessed by God. Not realizing it is God who has say over everything. God knows what you can do for him and knows each of your capabilities to do as such. (ln 30-2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People will set you up – but you need to know who your God is.. and who you are serving. (ln 36-37)</li> <li>You need to know what doesn't feel right and what does feel right. ...If it doesn't look right, smell right, walk right, or talk right, 9 times out of ten it is not right (ln 39-41)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When your sister or brother hurts, you should feel some of that pain as well. You shouldn't laugh at them or talk down about them... (ln 51-61)</li> <li>Harriet Tubman as the Moses of her people (ln 11—25)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You need to be careful who you share your visions and revelations to. People don't always see it as a blessing, some see it as you having something special from God. People are not always happy for you. (ln 139-40)</li> <li>Jesus as a brother's keeper on the cross(close/celebration) (ln 176-9)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Sharon

**Sermon Title:** Why We Can't Wait (2011)

**Scripture:** Acts1:1-11

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>But what this ascension tells us is that in Christ's... the infinite has embraced the finite. At the very heart of the Trinity now is human being, Jesus....so that we do not await heaven with a bare hope, but in our Head, Jesus we already possess it. (ln 18-22)-</li> <li>Troubles are not the only way to know there is a God...redeemed people .(ln 28-30)</li> <li>G: God O: fellowship R: humanity H: praying and living X</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily sanctification by the HS to become more like X</li> <li>Deceitfulness in our hearts and the power of corruption</li> <li>With X's return the mortal will take on the immortal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When it comes to serving the Lord, all of us who profess the faith of being children of God are mandate to be people of action. When are drawn into the family of God we receive the power of the Holy Spirit into our lives. (ln 57-9)</li> <li>S: helping others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opp: Fear, H: Spirit, friend Jesus</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the very heart of the Trinity now is human being, Jesus....so that we do not await heaven with a bare hope, but in our Head, Jesus we already possess it. (ln 18-22)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep it moving because we can't wait. We can't wait because the Holy Spirit is with us. (ln 40)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are called out to work on behalf of the other. (ln 50)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For those of us who want to do great things but live in fear you may need a confidence booster. (ln 70)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus in the wilderness with the disciples, death and victory, ascension (ln</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acts 1:1-11 When we look at the text Acts 1:1-11, it can be broken into 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>God told the disciples to wait but after that it was time for them to fulfill the</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	11-8)	sections: Looking Backward, Looking Forward, and Looking up. (ln 38-40)	commission to go into the world and be agents of change. (ln 55-6) – (actually a referent to the disciples in the upper room )	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The church calendar: the Ascension (ln 2-17)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looking Back we see the birth, ministry, the death of (on the) cross who (he) suffered. In this very odd life of Jesus, ... (ln 41-3)</li> <li>Looking Forward to living lives filled with the power of the Holy Spirit that daily sanctifies us so that we are continually becoming more like Christ. (ln 44-5)</li> <li>Looking Up we await the return of the Christ ... (ln 46-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Martin Luther King Jr. while in a Birmingham prison wrote a letter to his colleagues from the big steeple churches, who wanted him to pull in the reins on his civil rights movement and wait for a more appropriate time to fight for justice. MLK responded that they could no longer wait. (ln 51-6)</li> <li>Power of the HS at Azusa Street Revival (ln 59-69)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amos as a nobody who was called out to be a prophet (ln 76-84)</li> <li>story of fear reproducing from person to person (ln 88-118)</li> <li>Close/Celebration (ln 119-125)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Sharon

**Sermon Title:** The Well of Grace (2011)

**Scripture:** John 8:1-11

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge is power, power is freedom, and freedom enables a closer walk with God (ln 57)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(women) Wearing the cloak of shame because of past abuse, misuse or mistakes, they don't realize that Jesus Christ has washed them clean, purchased a robe of righteousness made just for them, and He is eager to place it on their shoulders. (ln 113-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We must find ways to join in the reconciling work of Jesus (ln 131)</li> <li>Reconciliation is about the other, not how comfortable we feel. (ln 133)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's the active work of showing the love of God. Reconciliation is salvation, a person being reconnected to God. It may cost us our dignity; it may cost us getting down in the dirt with someone and sharing in their suffering. But what reconciliation is not "I will pray for you theology." (ln 134-136)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In God's silence there's power at work. (ln 116)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a message to the church to allow the renewing work of God to flow into the lives of others. (ln 130-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Good News is no one is deserving of grace. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God does not condemn us. God will celebrate with us with balloons and gifts because God knows the story behind the story. ...the well of grace never runs dry. (ln 150-2; 157)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In John's Gospel, we're told of a shameful group of people who launched a horrendous conspiracy against her. This woman's dignity was of no</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early in the morning Jesus went to the temple to teach the people. In the midst of his teaching the church folks, brought the nameless woman and they said to</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Without saying a word, Jesus extended grace. Grace is that gift from God. Grace is forgiveness accompanied by new life by the Spirit. Each time</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	<p>concerned for the ones who plotted against the woman. She was only a tool being used to test Jesus. (ln 33-5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (uses the lectionary calendar, footnotes within the biblical text, church father's)</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus and into the hearing of all the people that were gathered in the temple, "This woman was caught in the very act of adultery and the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women; now what do you say?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus said nothing... (ln 58-76); biblical matriarchs (84-99)</li> </ul>		<p>you need it, no matter how long ago the shame came, grace is waiting for you. Grace is a well that never runs dry. (ln 147-9)</p>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As I sat on the baseball bleacher talking with other moms..., a mom told the story of 2 females; one in her 20's and the other only 9... we become desensitized to the uniqueness of one person (ln 15-24)</li> <li>• A story behind the story: The story of Medusa &amp; Athena (ln 25-32)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• present day feelings of shame (ln 77-83)</li> <li>• This isn't the story of a woman caught in the very act, but the story of many women – bowed down and hiding because of shame, feeling ugly and unworthy to accomplish God's dreams or any dreams. Paul reminds us that when we come to Christ, he makes us a new creation (...ln102-15)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can we serve the Lord when it doesn't look right? Can we welcome into our doors the 9 year old girl with her twin babies and approving parents? (ln 132-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Sharon

**Sermon Title:** Has The Gates of Hell Prevailed (2011)

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:13-20

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death or hell is that condition where we are eternally separated from God. God is deaf to cries and will not move. The Spirit and the light have gone out. There's stillness, a silence, and the only thing that remains is the pain left behind and remorseful regret, that all hope is gone. (ln 3-6)</li> <li>• Obj: Love</li> <li>• A place (the church) that reminds us God is powerful and compassionate enough to meet us right where we are and love us anyway we are(ln 26-8)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God's goodness disconnected from mercy would be too much for us. We would be completely overwhelmed by the power of good and couldn't take the 100% purity of goodness since we are sinful beings. (ln 60-1)</li> <li>• Mercy (ln 70-73);</li> <li>• sin is against the will of God (ln 71-2)</li> <li>• Opp: Sin Obj: Mercy, Goodness,</li> <li>• R: Believers, Humanity, Sinners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God never fails. We must lift our eyes unto the hill from where our help comes from, our Maker is unpredictable and spontaneous, and we must be flexible to hear and see ...</li> <li>• We must pray without ceasing asking the Holy Spirit to free us to live in the Spirit and not in whom does man say that I am. People will try to limit our abilities and stop our potentials. (ln 112-7) H: HS Opp People, tradition, S: the Church, life in the spirit, reconciliation</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to look at our mission and our message rather than on our mess and this too that church can no longer be a ritual. Church has to be relevant, important in the lives of people. (ln 22-4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We must not stay bound to our mess but loose ourselves in believing God never fails. (ln 34-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In this community the followers are to tell when we are bound to the light of God we are loosed from darkness. When this power is unleashed God's goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. As binding and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The worshipping church community is given these keys to tell our deeply disturbed society that wherever sin has overtaken us God can unlock us from it. And not only does God unlock but we as followers of Christ don't condemn</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
			loosing is a cohesive pair so is God's goodness and mercy. (ln 56-8)	you, you are welcomed in this place of worship. (ln 101-3)
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v18 as the gates of <b>death</b> shall not prevail against the church. (ln 2-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the very calling of the church into existence our unpredictable Savoir, choose a quirky place to lay out God's plan for the church...</li> <li>In the laying out the plan, binding and loosing is being exchanged. Questioning his disciples, Jesus asks, what have people bound me to and the disciples responded...(ln 36-58)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus spoke to Peter (ln 82-91)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A sermon was preached in 1927 titled the Hell Bound Express Train. All aboard for the hell bound express train. It makes some stops, I heard a man say, and "She made fourteen stops and pulled out one hour and a half behind time." I don't believe it...The church is so fickle...(ln 7-30)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desensitized to sin in America (ln 76-81)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will not speak judgmental words, or have gossiping eyes...(ln 104-8)</li> <li>If Jesus stood on the steps outside of this church and asked each one of us...(ln 118-21)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Sharon

**Sermon Title:** The Tenacity of Humanity (2011)

**Scripture:** Matthew 15:21-28

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christ was fully Divine and yet fully human born of a woman. Our Christ left glory to live on earth in order to get a firsthand experience of being human, sent to redeem humanity, and he took his badly bruised and scared human body back to glory where he sits at the Right Hand of God the Father and sympathizes with us and prays for us. (ln 36-39) H: X as intercessor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action was necessary to prove God’s love and forgiveness are genuine towards us. Because God wanted to stand with us in the loneliness, troubles and alienation we bring on ourselves when we separate ourselves from God and other people. (ln 59-62)</li> <li>G: God O: love, forgiveness Opp: troubles, alienation, S: G's love &amp; forgiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She is made to carry out his agenda, submerge her difference in his sameness. She indeed speaks the messianic word, she speaks for the other, those outside of the Jewish race, for a brief moment, she speaks in Jesus’ place that salvation is to all humankind. Yes, Lord even the dogs. (ln 96-00)</li> <li>S: the other, marginalized Opp: silence, H: those who speak up for the other, Canaanite woman</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In this story we see the range of God’s blessings goes beyond Israel, extending to all outside the Jewish community. (ln 11-2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We should sympathize with Christ remembering Christ was fully Divine and yet fully human born of a woman. (ln 36)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are not alone in our troubles. ... others have been there, survived, and flourished. (ln 136-8)</li> <li>The Canaanite woman did what most of us have been told for years to do – speak the word to God. She speaks for Christ, which is to say, Christ speaks through and for her. (ln 96)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus is the antagonist in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus was having a bad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our worn down Savior and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She speaks; he is silent;</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Scripture</b>	<p>this story with His infamous saying “Let the children FIRST be fed, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” The woman, as the helper, responds “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs. ... (ln 13-16)</p>	<p>week. First, he his cousin John the Baptist was beheaded, then when he sought privacy to grieve, over 5,000 people followed him and he ends up serving them dinner... (ln 44-58);</p>	<p>his disciples leave for the Mediterranean coast...he is confronted by the Canaanite woman who asks Jesus to perform a spiritual healing for her demon-possessed daughter. (ln 63-79)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The preacher then rewrites the story out of sympathy (ln 80-2)</li> </ul>	<p>she refuses the silence he imposes. The woman addresses Jesus three times and each time she called him “Lord.” Her crying out suggests she worked hard to get his attention. The word of deliverance for her daughter will have to be wrestled from the silent worn down non-sympathizing Christ. (ln 83-6)</p>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the historic city of Savannah, I heard of the tenacity of African American slaves...pyramids of Egypt...Frederick Douglas...Mahalia Jackson...MLK...) (ln 17-29)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If we can only sympathize with our Savior that looked down on a woman, who spoke racist words, and turned a cool shoulder to a child in need. (ln 31-2)</li> <li>• Our Savior acts more like one of us? Let us get tired and overworked, faced with personal...(ln 40-3)</li> <li>• CNN, etc. (ln 46-50)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Canaanite problem as the black problem (ln 67-73)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The tenacity of humanity when Jesus is silent (ln 101-3)</li> <li>• Tenacity requires the strength of slaves that endure hardship...(delineation of the black problem through the decades) (ln 107-135)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Sharon

**Sermon Title:** A Stolen Moment (2010)

**Scripture:** Luke 23:33-43

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are engrafted into the body of our suffering Christ and sit in heavenly places with our Savior. Because of Christ we are a part of the family of God obtaining all the graces that much more abounds. (ln 18-20)</li> <li>H: X Obj: graces, membership in the family of God, R: Xns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus) As King, true prophet and the greatest priest the world has ever known (ln 36)</li> <li>Opp: Ignorance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus’ world altering work, brought his death and showed the total depravity of people who voted for violence, blood, and death of their Savior. (ln 51-2)</li> <li>Opp: death, sin, depravity</li> <li>H: death X</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is God nailed to a cross. The God that is to be feared, respected, and honored. And this God doesn’t deserve our punishment. (ln 128-9)</li> <li>Opp: trials, back against the wall, sin</li> <li>H: Holy Spirit</li> <li>S: Testimony about God, Confession</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can say we have a God that draws us into God’s family (ln 23)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus’ tactical move not known to the angry crowd was fulfilling prophecy “If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all unto me.” (ln 32-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On this New Year’s Eve we must stop and think do we really want to celebrate the reign of Christ or drop to our knees and lament his mistreatment. (ln 66-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is the Holy Spirit at work in our lives testifying and applying to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us and thereby uniting us to God in our effectual calling. (ln 131-3)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moses, Jesus, Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. (ln 29-30)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Luke says of the onlookers “they were ignorant to their deeds.” Luke describes operating in sin as ignorant. (ln 54-64)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In ignorance the onlookers failed to realize what the Apostle Paul brags about that nothing in all creation, not even human efforts, can stop the gospel, nothing can prevent the triumph of God’s amazing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The thief, who stole a moment in time to reflect, said I deserve death because of my sins, but redeemer Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. The Prophet, the Priest, the</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
			love. (Romans 8:38) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(ln 62-64)</li> </ul>	King, our God replied “Truly, I tell you today you will be with me in Paradise.” (ln 143-5)
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I said “Monica don’t stop walking” “quickly tell me if Christ is King what does that mean to you.” She said “then I’m queen.” We laughed and kept walking. (ln 14-23)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advent as the New Year (ln 35-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monica on a chilly day only had a moment to tell me in passing about her faith in a God that accepted her into the family of God. The thief as his body was minimally supported on a cross had only one moment to tell the world what he believed. (ln 112-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What will we say when our backs are against the wall? When we face the loss of careers with good benefits, assisted living and nursing home facilities, become victims of violence, of greed, of addictions,</li> <li>Prisoners in ghettos, in old age, in sexism,</li> <li>People with broken bodies, and with broken lives (136-40)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Teresa

**Sermon Title:** When Waiting Gets Tough (2012)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 30:15-21

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God wants us to remember our salvation and direction is in him and comes from him (3:30)</li> <li>• Opp: the enemy</li> <li>• G: God</li> <li>• O: assignment, revelation, direction, banner of God,</li> <li>• R: Believers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God knew when we took off running that we didn't know the way ...and would miss the still small voice...(6:45)</li> <li>• God knows that in order for us to succeed we have to come back to him (8:00) (an all knowing God)</li> <li>• Opp: disobedience, not waiting for council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repentance- means a turn (10:30)</li> <li>• God sees through us, every doubt, every belief...(12:15)</li> <li>• There is a union of disappointment and discouragement that breeds a spirit of compromise, that pushes tiny holes in our joy...determination to go forward ..and we begin to lose spiritual energy (13:25) H: Holy Spirit</li> </ul>	
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When God tells us something we many times hear him ...then instead of waiting for the rest of the words...we replace his words with our own and begin to go. (2:40-3:20)</li> <li>• God has already made the way for us to be blessed in his Divine council ...our strength comes from direction of God...the strength often requires that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We get to the place and think we're the ones waiting...but God is the one who is waiting he marks the place where we left him and then waits for us (7:47)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to come to a point where we that may lead us into repentance because we need to start to inquire what is wrong, and not just blame God ...consider what it might be and ask ...as the HS brings us into truth...we'll have something to repent about (10:50)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of moaning and groaning that God did this to me...that's our red flag that we need to go back to visit the circumstances and ask the Holy Spirit to show us ourselves (15:30)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	we wait (3:20-4:05)			
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Isa 30:15-31- in returning and rest shall ye be saved...but ye saith no...and we will...therefore shall you... and therefore will the lord wait...blessed are all they that wait for him...he will be gracious unto the at the voice of thy cry when he shall hear it he shall answer thee...(00:45-2:26)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elijah running all the way to the mountain and God wasn't there...then heard the voice of God in still quite voice (7:00)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Peter 2:9 the Lord is not slack concerning his promises ...the Lord is longsuffering toward us ...but that all should come to repentance (9:45)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We don't like to wait...God gives us information and we take off missing the critical information, putting our spin on it and go...running up and down hills and valleys ...flagpole without a flag(4:05-6:08)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We don't realize that we have ran too far and too soon and we start to do what we call self-examination (like Shirley Caesars song)...we start trying to reason with the Lord...we say "lord I know...Lord...Lord..."(8:18)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The armor of God begins to breakdown...disappointment, discouragement...(12:45)</li> <li>We begin to judge ourselves and call ourselves less in God, but God is still waiting on us to come back for the proper adjustment (14:30)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Teresa

**Sermon Title:** From Power to Pain (2012)

**Scripture:** I Kings

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When God anoints us with his discerning spirit and anointing...we should go into immediate action because that anointing will overshadow what is not of God...(8:15)</li> <li>Opp: making the wrong choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: living in clarity and with direction, spiritual maturity</li> <li>H: stumbling blocks that help us to grow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Power comes from pain (19:08)</li> <li>H: Pain, prayer</li> <li>Opp: sacrificing in the wrong places/sin</li> <li>We are missing sin with salvation ...salvation is not a permit to sin ...salvation is a commandment not to sin (22:25)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When God awakens us to see the wrong we must immediately change...because God is not going to show us the wrong without showing us the right (10:45)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When we give ourselves into the hands of God, he will give us direction. (14:50)</li> <li>Spiritual maturity and growth will incorporate pain (15:50)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When we go to God will turn our pain to power (16:50)</li> <li>We activate the power of the Holy Ghost by asking God...we activate the power of freedom...we are activating the dominion power...now we see us taking authority over whatever situation in front of us (18:00)</li> <li>We must confess, repent, and hear (25:40)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We know the story about David and that Solomon asked God for wisdom and God...here God was experiencing pain (v. 7) ...I am a little child and know not how to come out and go in...he is asking God to give him understanding...He was more concerned about being the right kind of King...it pleased God (3:00)</li> <li>(v.3,4,7...) He sacrificed and burnt incense in high places (5:41)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-v.15 he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant and offered burnt offerings...he made an immediate change. (10:25)...he was doing the right thing in the wrong place (11:51)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We see Solomon in a painful situation not knowing what to do ...but because of the pain he asked the right question...he was (12:36)</li> </ul>	
<b>Familiar Experience</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If we will go to the Lord and express our concerns...ask for clarity and direction (13:30)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greek words for power (16:50)</li> <li>The birthing process, a woman travailing until she delivers (19:20)</li> <li>Sometimes we have been misled (21:15)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Teresa

**Sermon Title:** Seasons: Recognize Accept or Change (2012)

**Scripture:** Revelation 12:7-12

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: speaking truth about the power of the blood and God/ testimony</li> <li>X the season of X making intercession for us will last until the very end but others will be very short (6:45)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>H: Holy Ghost</li> <li>S: Seasons</li> <li>We should praise God that there is so much of X in us that the enemy would chose us as his target (7:22)</li> <li>spirit of God moves through us as instruments for God to operate in others (10:30)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a knowing placed in our spiritual DNA that causes us to know when it's time to do a specific thing (12:00)</li> <li>Opp: we do not live up to the expectations and seek God because we do not want the responsibility (12:30)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three things we need to consider when it comes to season. We need to recognize the season. We need to accept the season or we need to change it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everything has its time and purpose (5:50)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have the anointing of the holy ghost to face anything our season may hold (7:30)</li> <li>When time and purpose meet something happens (9:02)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When we miss the purpose of our season we have just missed a Divine blessing (13:30)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eccl...to everything there is a season a purpose a time under the son (:00)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rev 12:11 – we see a different season/time the end times. ...the saints of God ...in the form of testimony about the blood of the lamb...have not only brought others to salvation...but brought</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rev 12- we have the power to confront the enemy and win. (8:45)</li> <li>Jer 8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deut. 6:23</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
		many of them to martyrism (to be martyrs)... (3:00)		
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Many times we ask the Lord “what do I do with this. Is this a season that I’m in or is it not ” 0:30</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moments of time and purpose meeting (9:10)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Teresa

**Sermon Title:** Seasons: Recognize Accept or Change (2012) cont....

**Scripture:** Revelation 12:7-12

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God as a shelter in righteousness through accepting Jesus sacrifice (14:45)</li> <li>• S: righteous living</li> <li>• We can now lay our concerns at the foot of the cross (16:20)</li> <li>• Jesus has already defeated Satan...we are our own enemy...we allow certain things to happen...(19:00)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God is the only one who knows when the season will come (23:10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divinely orchestrated separation from the past helps us recognize our new season (27:40)</li> <li>• We must forgive so that we can forgive whatever God has to give us (30:00)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H: Repent</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When we accept X as our savior we have a change in season and have a turnaround in our life (15:30)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We must walk in a way that when the season is upon us we are ready to receive it (23:20)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can't operate effective in our new season without separation from the old one (27:00)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have missed some seasons but we can ask God to change our seasons ...if we repent (30:50)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issachar the son of Jacob prayed ....</li> <li>• Paul tells the Thessalonians that he does not know the time or the season of Jesus return. (22:45)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Thess 5:8-9...be sober...in faith love and hope...(29:00)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acts 13...repent...turn away...so times of refreshing will come from the Lord (31:15)</li> <li>• John 4:9 –he is faithful to forgive our sins (32:00)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we should be praying ....</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>different types of time: tick tock time and God's Divine time (24:00)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can miss our season we lose focus and take our eyes off of Christ, hold on to the past, .....we miss our season (25:50)</li> </ul>	

**Preacher:** Valerie

**Sermon Title:** Where’s My Daddy? (2011)

**Scripture:** Ephesians 6:4

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We must proclaim within our community, and beyond its borders, to all of those who understand the Divine kinship of humankind, that the oppressed must go free—now (In 26-28)</li> <li>Opp: socio-economic injustices</li> <li>S: AA males, proclamation of freedom, advocating for freedom, Divine kinship</li> <li>O: freedom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>And I hope God will help us to repent, to open our eyes and ears and see and hear our children’s cries for help and guidance, and act to save them all—now! (In 67-9)</li> <li>H: God</li> <li>S: Repentance</li> <li>Opp: noninvolved adults,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: fatherhood ; imitating God as Father</li> <li>H: Jesus’ demonstration of the father; the church envisioning creativity for society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: Responsible Fathers</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oh, these may not be your sons and daughters but as Christian men representing the KOG and wherever it is, the question this morning that is asked of you--“Where’s my daddy?” Is relevant! (In 36-8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are asking the wrong question when we ask, “What’s wrong with our children?”... The simple answer to the wrong question is, adults. Adults are what’s wrong with our children. (In 45,53)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no role in our modern society that suffers greater neglect as far as God is concerned than that of the father... the best thing any parent can do is imitate God the Father. (In 104-6;115)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are responsible to give your children the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual nourishment they need to grow to be healthy and whole human beings.(In 139-40)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul says, “ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul says you are also responsible to not provoke them to anger! Now this is a commandment and not a</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
			<p>instruction of the Lord... (ln 102-3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We get our best glimpse of what the heavenly Father is like by looking at His Son...(ln 117-26)</li> </ul>	<p>suggestion. The verb is present tense, active voice, imperative mood....(ln 139-47)</p>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Father's day, and the criminal torture system as a present day plantation (American Correctional Association); incarceration of AA males (ln 1-28)</li> <li>Discrimination of AA male students in schools and lack of black males in supportive roles (ln 29-38)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children misbehaving, and adults not fulfilling their responsibilities or setting an example in the community. (ln 44-66)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is an interesting time to be an African American man and father. An African American father has been elected to give leadership to a nation with a legacy of emasculating black men socially and economically. President Barack Obama...black girls, boys, youth, children (ln 71-98)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The role of fatherhood has changed over the years in our society (ln 32-7)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Valerie

**Sermon Title:** Where’s My Daddy (2011) cont....

**Scripture:** Ephesians 6:4

	Sequence 5	Sequence 6	Sequence 7	Sequence 8
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G: Father</li> <li>O: Love</li> <li>R: Children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fathers you realize that the Spirit gave this charge regarding our children to you. He did not give it to the mother, though her role is absolutely necessary in its being carried out. (ln 230-1)</li> <li>G: Spirit</li> <li>O: calling</li> <li>S: Christian Fathers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The church is not called upon to raise your children. Oh, the church is called upon to help the families within her midst. The church is called upon to be involved in the instruction of the children within her fellowship. Fathers, it is your responsibility; it ultimately rests on your shoulders. That is your calling. Nobody can bring out the best possibilities, the best potential in your child like you can (ln 235-9) H: The Church</li> </ul>	
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your presence (i.e., Christ's through the example and teaching of the father) should be felt in the home, in its rules, its worship, and through the father's (your) gentle love, leadership and example. (ln 168-70)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fathers when you take on the responsibility to teach and instruct your children the possibility for their success is without measure. (ln 224-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He has given you the Responsibility, the Accountability and the way to bring out the Possibility in your child. Now when the question is asked: “Where’s my daddy?” Like our heavenly Father you can stick your chest out and say, I’m right here! (ln 248-50)</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 5	Sequence 6	Sequence 7	Sequence 8
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ephesians 6:4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The word for instruction is <b>nouthesia</b>, focusing more on the verbal instruction, the warning, and the counsel given to a child. It means to place before someone's mind. In <b>1 Samuel 3</b>, God's anger over Eli's poor fathering is revealed to young Samuel... (ln 225-9)</li> </ul>		
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies show that fathers in childhood are important (ln 172-202)</li> <li>The God Father, the movie (ln 183-88)</li> <li>Illustration of child buying a father's time. (ln 205-19)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not the role of the daycares, schools, etc. to father</li> </ul>		

**Preacher:** Valerie

**Sermon Title:** To Do Justice (2011)

**Scripture:** Multiple Texts- Topical Sermon

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: Era of Crisis; a sleeping church</li> <li>• S: Faithful Xns, Justice, Kin-dom of G</li> <li>• H: The Church</li> <li>• And, Understanding that God unequivocally calls his own to Social Justice, the Church must awaken from her slumber on her bed of ease. The Church must encourage the vision of God’s kingdom, (ln 44-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H: progressive church</li> <li>• S: doing justice</li> <li>• G: God</li> <li>• Obj: calling</li> <li>• R: Xns/the Church</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micah clearly links love of God with love for others(ln 122)</li> <li>• S: love from others</li> <li>• Opp: not speaking out for others</li> <li>• G: God</li> <li>• O: call to stewardship</li> <li>• God’s social ideal is a compassionate community in which all persons are equally valued as fellow image bearers. Isaiah describes the future Zion as “the city of righteousness...redeemed by justice(ln 151-4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It’s time, it’s past time for the church to come up out of her slumber, come up out of the tomb and rise from the dead.</li> <li>• (Resurrection having implications here and now) (ln 229-30)</li> <li>• S: A Risen Church</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This bleak portrait of the various crises in the “beloved community” suggest that indeed, it is time for a change if we are to live out the gospel imperatives to “love our neighbor” and to care for the “least of these.” (ln 33-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In this twenty-first century, God is calling for progressive Christians to not only engage in critical social analysis of these problems, not only to be aware of social sin, but to be deeply concerned so much so that we are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking about justice is easy. Doing justice is not! (ln 192)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking about justice is easy. Doing justice is not! But with God on our side and pure love in our hearts injustices can be overcome with the justice of God. (ln 240-1)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	6)	willing to do Justice. (ln 73-6)		
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justice is the heart of the kingdom of God. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).... (ln 44-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like those in the early Christian community in the book of Acts. These early Christians knew something about the verb of To Do Justice. Ah yes, continued to teach and participate in acts of healing after Jesus' death so that "many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles" (Acts 5:12). (ln 83-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scripture teaches that, "the Lord is a God of justice" (Isa 30:18), that "righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne" (Ps 97:2) and that God always acts justly (Gen 18:25)...Micah... (ln 101-29)....</li> <li>the bible says that these faithless prophets ...were not speaking out and this resulted in abuse of the Word of God leaving the people of God impotent and defenseless against the winds of adversity...(ln 133-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The women going to tomb looking for Jesus...and Jesus had risen...</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crisis in US, schools, AA's, community, CNN headlines (ln 28-32)</li> <li>Justice sits on a four legged stool. That is the legs of Distribution, Power, Equity, and Rights. Justice entails ... (ln 40-3)</li> <li>Local civil rights activist and female president of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To do Justice defined as a verb (ln 77-81)</li> <li>Peter and Hasty in their book..."oh but I hear you saying" (internal dialogue) (ln 88-7)</li> <li>Speaking truth to power (ln 99-100)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kind of sounds like the 21<sup>st</sup> century...(ln 141-50)</li> <li>People in Nashville going hungry due to a commercial church...(ln 161-7)</li> <li>Poet James Russell (ln 168-71)</li> <li>The history of trying to do justice for AA's, MLK,</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
	NAACP, child death in Arizona (ln 52-70)		TN labor wages, education, H. Thurman (ln 193-216)	

**Preacher:** Valerie

**Sermon Title:** I Believe (2011)

**Scripture:** John 9:35-38

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: spiritual blindness</li> <li>• S: Spiritual Vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: rejection by people/the church; hurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: rejecting the evidence of Jesus as messiah, preconceptions</li> <li>• S: belief, worship</li> <li>• G: God</li> <li>• O: Messiah</li> <li>• R: Humanity</li> </ul>	
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As we journey on this 40 Day Lenten season of Prayer and Fasting, the scales are falling from my eyes. The vision for the church is coming into focus.(ln 85-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beloved there is no evil, no hurt that comes nigh unto you that the Lord is not aware of. It is true, his eye is on the sparrow and I know, he watches over you. (ln 97-9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We ought to worship the Lord because of what we believe (ln 137)</li> </ul>	
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus performing miracles and conflicts with the Pharisees in John ; the particular encounter with Jesus and the blind man. (ln 1-70)</li> <li>• -The (spiritually) blind are questioning the seeing ... (ln 78-85)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Pharisees get so angry with the man for his heartfelt testimony of Jesus, the transforming power of God’s grace that they throw him out of the synagogue... The bible says that Jesus knew they had thrown him out of church—</li> <li>• (ln 91-9)...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus went looking for the man and when he found the man He asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” (ln 100-4)</li> </ul>	

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Barbara Brown Taylor as expert witness on the passage (ln 72)</li> <li>” Somebody in here can identify with this man. Oh you may not have been blind physically, but all of us have been spiritually blind. But an encounter with Jesus made all the difference in the world. Oh yes, I was blind but thank God, I thank God now I can see. What about it, can you see? (ln 82-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anybody in here ever been thrown out of a church? Been sat down in a church, had your hands tied in the church, ever been hurt by the church? (ln 93-4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This text exposes the real reason why people reject Jesus...it did not conform to their preconceived ideas as to the conclusion of who the Messiah would be. (ln 106-9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confession of Belief as Celebration: that in the Christian Church, we have no creed but Christ, ah, but using the Disciples Affirmation that we read this morning, allow me to tell you what I believe.</li> <li>And if you believe it say yes!</li> <li>I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God-...(ln 114-141)</li> <li>Change “formal doctrine” folk saying in close as confessions of belief (ln 144-161)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Valerie

**Sermon Title:** He Wants It All (2011)

**Scripture:** Mark 14: 1-9

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There’s something else too, Jesus is not only about perfection He is perfection. He lived a perfect life on this earth, and that enabled Him to die a perfect death, thereby securing a perfect salvation, all for you and me. (ln 15-6)</li> <li>• G: Jesus Obj: union with God R: Xns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S: giving out of love, honoring God, devoted discipleship</li> <li>• Opp: Religious Duties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H: Spending time with Jesus</li> <li>• S: Knowledge of Jesus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The one thing that we will never be able to do in Heaven is to win someone to Christ. I believe we must do what we can, the best we can, all that we can, and when we can.</li> <li>• (ln 116-118) –Sidebar steeped in evangelism with expectation of “other heaven”</li> <li>• S: Sacrifice to God and fellow man (ln 142-3)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything Jesus did was for our benefit! For instance, nobody made Him leave the comforts of Heaven, but He did. Nobody made Him suffer brutality at its worst, but He did. Nobody made Him die, and nobody killed Him; He chose to die. He did all of these things and more, for our benefit, so that we might see and be reunited with God through Jesus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And beloved, that’s all God wants. He wants our sacrifice and our devotion. And beloved, all that we do, all that we give to the Lord should be given out of our love and honor for him! (ln 35-36)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And we will never know God’s will for our lives until we spend that time with Him, too. We need to take regular and frequent time with Jesus so we can let our hearts be sensitive to His love for us. (ln 95-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He wants it all.... He sees you, individually, and He expects to see you give your best, no matter what that might be. (ln 146-9)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 says,</li> <li>• God made Him, who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.'...(ln 19-24)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark 14:1-9 ...the unnamed woman named Mary who gave her all. (ln 30-34)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mary's heart as sensitive to Jesus and at the feet of Jesus, from John 11 and Luke 10:38-42 (ln 71-95)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mary displayed her sensitive heart (ln 99-120)</li> <li>• the anointing of Jesus – The text says...she broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head) (ln 122-4)</li> <li>• the widow's mite (ln 150-2)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief to bear!'" (ln 25)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prayer, devotion, being with the Lord over religious duties (ln 51-68)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The definition of sacrifice in the lives of everyday people (ln 126-356)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Valerie

**Sermon Title:** He Wants It All (2011) cont....

**Scripture:** Mark 14:: 1-9

	Sequence 5	Sequence 6	Sequence 7	Sequence 8
<b>God-Talk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: Criticism, worldly influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through grace by faith we have been saved not by our works (ln 204-220)</li> <li>• the willingness of the flesh (ln 228-9)</li> </ul>		
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beloved even when you walk close with the Lord, it is so hard to stay out from under the influence of the world. (ln 175-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it is consistently the small things that have made the biggest difference to God...(ln 231-2)</li> </ul>		
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mary receiving blistering criticism... (ln 165-178)</li> <li>• Jesus defends the woman (ln 198-202)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moses and the Rod, feeding the 5000 (ln 232-5)</li> </ul>		
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The cold water committee” people always finding fault (ln 178-189)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing the works of the community and church (ln 226-230)</li> <li>• Close/Celebration: CeCe Winans “Alabaster Jar” (ln 243-73)</li> </ul>		

**Preacher:** Vicki

**Sermon Title:** The Silence We Keep (2007)

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 13:19-20

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>				
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since we see how sexual assault and violence against women and children can devastate individuals, communities and destroy families, we no longer give assent to the power of silence to cripple and confuse us. (ln 58-60)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first step we may consider in our quest for wholeness and restoration ... is to understand that we cannot wait for someone else to rescue and heal us (ln 76-7)</li> <li>Whatever we have lost or been stripped of can be and must be reclaimed. My sisters and brothers, we can begin shattering the façade of the safety of silence with the first stroke of our pens. Tell the story.(ln 84-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once the story has been told and written down and tell someone in authority,.. Do not carry the weight and burden of guilt and shame for crimes you did not commit. (ln 88-92)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absalom giving counsel to his sister Tamar who has been forcibly raped by her brother Amnon in the household of her father, King David (ln 2-10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tamar lived in patriarchal times and within a situation of life far different from our lives today. (ln 70-75) ( V. Bridgeman as an expert for her exegesis)</li> <li>Our response to sexual violence within our family does not have to be the</li> </ul>		

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
		same as hers (ln 71)		
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As African Americans...to avoid being ostracized, as black and brown people we ignore the trauma inflicted upon the very people we profess to love. Our women and children, boys and girls, become expendable...(ln 13-57)</li> <li>Katie Cannon (ln 14); Norman Wright (ln 34); Robin Stone (45-48); Audre Lord (ln 62)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>V Bridgeman (ln 71-74)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing our stories down in an unedited free writing style is helpful because it allows us to revisit those fearful and tearful places within the safety of ink and paper. Every violation, every time, every name can be written without retribution and the truth of the story can finally be revealed and released from its hiding place within our body (ln 82-4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An African proverb warns that a person who conceals their illness cannot expect to be healed. (ln 93-5)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Vicki

**Sermon Title:** The Silence, cont....

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 13:19-20

	Sequence 5	Sequence 6	Sequence 7	Sequence 8
<b>God-Talk</b>				
<b>Conveying Truth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>If we are certain that we want to be made whole, we must associate with Healing Professionals. (ln 96-7)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>we must embrace the holiness and sacredness of loving ourselves by connecting to spiritual truths like those found in Baby Sugg’s prayer and blessing for the people in Toni Morrison’s Beloved. (ln 108-110)</li></ul>		
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In some ways Beloved becomes the scripture/sacred text that the preacher engages (ln 108-116)</li><li>She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. “Here”, she said, ...</li></ul>		
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Able to understand and express our anger, fear, frustration, with a serious intent to resolve them- in a network of supporting</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>...like those found in Baby Sugg’s prayer and blessing for the people in Toni Morrison’s Beloved. (ln</li></ul>		

	<b>Sequence 5</b>	<b>Sequence 6</b>	<b>Sequence 7</b>	<b>Sequence 8</b>
	friends and family members , and a counselor (ln 100-7)	108-110)		

**Preacher:** Vicki

**Sermon Title:** Oil for Pouring (2005)

**Scripture:** Mark 14:3-9

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: trials</li> <li>• O: oil for pouring, praise</li> <li>• G: God (a God who designs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp: people talk about you</li> <li>• S: pouring your oil before God, Praise,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H: forgiveness</li> <li>• R: Xns</li> <li>• H: Jesus speaking up</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything you have been through and all you have yet to go through has been by God’s Divine design...you need to know today, you are producing an oil of pouring. (ln 148-151)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you survive the oil producing process, I promise you my friends the same fate that befell the woman in our story will most certainly befall you too. (ln 173-4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I’m so glad about it because God is not a respecter of person. What Jesus did for her, God will do for you. Today is your day. Today, if you hear my voice, harden not your hearts, Today is your day-it’s your day to forgive past hurts, and to produce some oil. (ln 206-9)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v3 ...this nameless woman in this passage made her way to Jesus and yet, did not come empty handed. Verse 3 illustrates this point stating that not only did the woman come with an alabaster jar of costly ointment; ... (ln 80-108)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v4-5 But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way?</li> <li>• For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her (ln 168-71)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• v6-9 Jesus speaks up in the middle of their foolishness and takes her side. She doesn’t have to say a word in her own defense. (196-202)</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Familiar Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Maya Angelou said, “One is not necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. (ln 47-9)</li> <li>• Rev. Adia Blackman, the owner of Blackwoman Press first published my book entitled “A Drop of Oil.” ... (ln 52-64)</li> <li>• I, like many other colored girls considered suicide when I not only did not see the rainbow but just knew it wasn’t enough... (ln 63-70)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Charles H. Long, professor of Religious Studies, share with me that oil is a human production...(ln 110-126)</li> <li>• Other scholars have negatively referred to this woman as a sinner or as a prostitute. I contend that if she is a sinner, like many of us, ... (ln 123-8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many of you that when you really get serious about pouring out your oil, your pain, your testimony, your oil, your love your forgiveness, your oil from your jar, when you get serious about pouring out your oil before the Lord, people will still talk about you...(ln 177-86)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -My mother used to say, where you show out is where you get wo’ out” and right here all the negative, back biters get helped by Jesus. He says, “Leave her alone. She has done what she could.” (ln 202-04)</li> </ul>

**Preacher:** Vicki

**Sermon Title:** A Fence, A Furnace, A Favor (2007)

**Scripture:** II Corinthians 12:1-10

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>God-Talk</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>G: God</li> <li>O- thorn, protection, spiritual gifts</li> <li>Opp: haughtiness, self-sufficiency pride</li> <li>S: humility</li> <li>H: thorn</li> <li>R: Xns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S: prayer, faith</li> <li>H: thorn</li> <li>R: Xns</li> <li>God responds. God is alive and active in the lives of his people – God responds – God responds to his child, (ln 196-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A God who gives grace as a favor (ln 214-21)</li> <li><b>GRACE</b> is the unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor and love of God. It is the influence of the spirit of God operating daily in humanity to regenerate and to strengthen us....simply enough (ln 214-21)</li> </ul>
<b>Conveying Truth</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>So then the thorn provides a fence for us, a hedge, keeping us from becoming conceited with the revelation. (ln 168-9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Likewise our thorns can be prayer producing (ln 185-91)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The grace of the almighty Creator, the Sovereign One, the Everlasting to Everlasting, has placed the Seal of Grace upon you (ln 211-2)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We find ourselves not unlike the people Paul encounters Corinth. In 146 BC roman invaders destroyed a thriving seaside country called Corinth. Corinth was filled with all types of people...(ln 63-101)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v6 -7... Paul does not share it and the scribes and redactors of the New Testament and none of the editors in all the councils let slip the nature of his thorn. Paul does say however in Romans 7:19,...(ln 103-116)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v8 three times Paul prayed (ln 171-183)</li> <li>v9 God responds (ln 196-7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v9-10 My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (ln 204-5)</li> </ul>
<b>Familiar</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This nation of ours was</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many of us here today</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Likewise our thorns can be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is not the grace of the</li> </ul>

	Sequence 1	Sequence 2	Sequence 3	Sequence 4
<b>Experience</b>	<p>founded and established upon the thorns of inequity and inequality...(ln 4-11)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>purposeful breeding of human beings for economic empowerment ... (ln 13-18)</li> <li>Choosing to forget and ignore the African concepts of “ I am because we are” and Gye Nyame – Except God –there is no power greater than God who is supreme and sovereign and Sankofah...family... (ln 20-61)</li> </ul>	<p>have been given spiritual gifts by God through his Spirit and by his generosity and if we were not fenced in we would open shops as a fortune tellers and soothsayers.... (ln 146-66)</p>	<p>prayer producing (ln 185-91)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dr. Harry Simmons says that suffering calls for a response and God responds to this man’s suffering– God allows the thorn in Paul’s flesh to accomplish it’s (purpose) (ln 199-201)</li> </ul>	<p>world.. (ln 207-10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signal for close (ln 229)...Angela Spivey song, “these thorns” (ln 230-9)</li> <li>amazing grace (ln 253-7)</li> </ul>

APPENDIX

C:

CLERGYWOMAN ELECTRONIC QUESTIONNAIRE

First Name:

Last Name:

City/State:

Email Address:

Denominational Affiliation:\*

Have you preached for at least 5 years?\*

Yes

No

Which of the following apply to you?\*

I am a senior/lead teaching-preaching pastor of a congregation

I am an associate/assistant pastor who preaches in my congregation at least  
7 times per year

I am a clergywoman who preaches at least 6 times per year in various  
locations, but I do not pastor a congregation

At some point in time I was not granted the permission to preach within a denomination or ecclesial body because I am a woman.\*

True

False

\* Indicates a required response.

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