

COLLABORATIVE PREACHING:

OCCASIONAL CO-PREACHING WITH CHURCH MEMBERS

TO ALIGN THE MEDIUM WITH THE MESSAGE

AND BUILD DISCIPLES

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The traditional sermon is an individual act, and therefore a limited medium for the proclamation of the gospel that is a pronouncement and calling for all. An occasional practice of collaborative preaching – working with an appropriately gifted member of a congregation to develop and deliver a sermon – helps communicate the gospel as given to all of us, for all of us to share. Preaching collaboratively allows the sermon medium to complement the collective qualities of the gospel message, like mutual relationship and the priesthood of all believers. The benefits of occasional collaborative preaching to congregations, preaching partners, and pastors justify the practice as a faithful investment in building the Church.

The Collective Gospel and the Limits of an Individual Medium

Traditional Christian preaching, as practiced exclusively by an individual, is an inherently limited way to proclaim a gospel message that is corporate in its origins and its best hopes. Christian preaching is a spoken engagement with holy scripture to open hearers to an encounter with the living God. The message communicated by our preaching is the Word of God definitively revealed in Jesus Christ, attested in the scriptures, and affirmed in experience.¹ That gospel message which preaching carries is collective, yet elements of the medium of traditional individual Christian preaching hide the collective nature of what God in Christ has to say and would have us do.

The Word of God made incarnate in the person of Jesus the Christ expresses God's generous love for all. Christ's ministry re-focused the attention of the faithful upon the scope of God's ultimate concern toward all, beyond the ordered circles of social and religious

¹ This framework borrows the ordered sources of the Word's authority as identified by theologian James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1975), 3.

convention, working through relationships with outcasts and sinners. The Apostle Paul clarifies the scope of Christ's collective commitment: "Jesus died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them" (2 Corinthians 5:15; NRSV). The gospel good news is that God's truth has come in Jesus the Christ, who died and was raised for all, and that God's redemptive reign is coming, as all hearts are transformed and all lives align with Christ's.² Therefore the message of Christian preaching is, like Christ himself, for all.

The message of Christian preaching is also a call to all, summoning all to change, faith, relationship, and community. The risen Jesus commissioned the disciples collectively for proclamation of the gospel: "[Y'all] go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with y'all always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).³ The Church has inherited this commission, as the continued reflection of Christ's commitment, purpose, and work for the world, functioning collectively as the Living Body of Christ.⁴ The communal nature of the Word is articulated by the communion table, with Christ at its head and all persons of faith gathered around it in equal and mutual fashion.

² Titus 3:4-7. While the gospel is expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Paul approaches its essence for all: "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

³ NRSV translation with my insertions of the word "y'all" to indicate where the Greek New Testament specifies the second person plural, which conventional English can leave unclear or ambiguous.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:27. Paul uses this image of the body of Christ in his letter to the churches in Corinth: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

While an individual preacher's words can reflect the gospel's collective address and call, the medium of an individual preacher does not reinforce the collectivity of the message, and can even work against it. Marshall McLuhan argues that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, even becoming essential to the substance of the message.⁵ As with every form of communication, the medium matters in the message, and the medium of an individual preacher reinforces certain aspects of the gospel and hides or distorts others. For example, the medium of an individual preacher conveys well the embodied Word, while failing to convey the communal nature expressed by the embodied Word. Therefore, the medium of an individual preacher elevated above others, if practiced exclusively, risks becoming the message itself, at the expense of the communal nature of the Word that is preached.

As a consistent convention, preaching that is unilateral and univocal can serve to cloud the collective message of the gospel. Individual preaching reserves reading and studying and speaking the gospel for one person at a time. It limits interpretation and witness to the perspective of a single person. It professionalizes interpretation and proclamation in the worship setting. Whatever the content of the sermon, the medium of an individual set apart to preach says that only a select few can do this, and that most should not try. Most drastically, individual preaching also risks confusing the preacher with the Savior being proclaimed. Even if specific words arguing for this individualized and professionalized vision of preaching are never spoken, the medium makes the statement powerfully. Expanding participation and facilitating partnership with church members in the preaching journey helps remove some of the unhelpful

⁵ Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964) 7. McLuhan claims the way we receive communication influences the message in ways that may go unnoticed.

walls that the traditional practice erects. This becomes even more clear when we experience an alternative.

Collaborative Preaching as an Occasional Variation of the Customary Practice

An occasional alternative mode of collaborative preaching with a member of the congregation can overcome the limitations of exclusive individual preaching and better align the sermon medium with the gospel message. I recommend a model of sermon development and proclamation that is entirely collaborative, within a consistent partnership, from first encounter with the scripture to delivery of the sermon. Sharing the entire sermon journey allows each step of the preaching process to benefit from collaboration, and allows preaching partners to benefit from each step of the process. This occasional variation of the traditional practice benefits the faithful proclamation of the gospel in ways edifying for pastors, preaching partners, and congregations.

Collaborative preaching has precedent, most typically as a preaching partnership between ordained pastors, but the medium of collaboration has even more significant spiritual value as a partnership between an ordained pastor and a layperson. “Tag team preaching” is a common practice in certain African American worship styles, typically involving two or more ordained preachers preaching in a back and forth style of delivery.⁶ Many of the benefits of a collaborative proclamation are received in such a practice between ordained preachers, in ways that are dynamic and inspired. There are additional benefits to be received from collaboration

⁶ See, e.g., Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. and Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, “Prophetic Grief” (video of sermon at Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, IL, June 24, 2015), accessed February 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqImk7g2RD0>.

between an ordained preaching pastor and a layperson. Preaching that is collaborative across the traditional pastor/layperson divide communicates the priesthood of all believers, the inspired power of relationships and community, and the proclamation of the gospel as a shared vocation in ways that collaboration between pastoral professionals cannot. As a faithful adventure into new territory for pastor and parishioner, collaboration on a sermon also has great potential for spiritual development for both partners.

Collaborating on a sermon with a church member also shares the riches of discovery about God and self that are offered by the sermon journey. The inductive style of sermon composition proffered by Fred Craddock recognizes the spiritual value of discovery in the preacher's journey, and fashions its rhetorical style to lead hearers on a journey of discovery like preacher's.⁷ But this kind of discovery is managed and planned by the preacher, and still withholds the marvels of a preacher's discoveries that include receiving, wondering, discerning, and discovering over time. Unless the wonders of the whole journey are shared, the potential sermons possess to help participants discover their own place and call in God's unfolding story remains withheld from those who do not preach. Occasional collaborative preaching shares the riches of the preaching journey with others and helps build their voices of witness and discipleship.

Many worship traditions practice occasional collaboration in other elements of liturgy, but unnecessarily limit preaching to a single individual. Scriptures, songs and prayers are commonly given together, in tandem, or responsively. Worship texts and songs offered in

⁷ Fred B. Craddock. *As One Without Authority* (Nashville, TN: Chalice Press, 1981) 3-4. The inductive style of preaching recognizes and seeks to share the power of the interpretive journey, while guiding a process that is open-ended in the actual experience of the preacher.

multiple voices carry a powerful message in the diversity of bodies, mannerisms, and sounds they carry in unified fashion. Sharing the preparation and delivery of worship liturgy invites and includes laypeople into the responsibility and experience of leading worship, and helps worship reflect a plurality of voices. The same occasional practice of collaboration, with careful pastoral leadership, can be applied to sermons. Sermons, too, can and should occasionally be given by more than one voice, so that the medium of sharing can also reflect the collective nature of the gospel we proclaim.

While the tradition of the sermon is reserved for an individual, Christian theology and ecclesiology and many forms of polity have ample room for alternative forms. In my own tradition, the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), the responsibility for preaching is assigned to a Teaching Elder trained in the study of scripture, spiritual discipline, pastoral sensitivity, and clear communication of witness. While the polity of the PCUSA makes explicit the tradition of an individual preacher, it also carries an understanding of ministry and worship that makes way for collaboration and alternative forms of even the sermon. Being ordered in ministry “in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church.”

While individual preaching, as a medium, does not communicate clearly the collective aspects of the gospel, it does communicate other facets of the gospel, and is therefore valuable as a primary practice. An individual preaching communicates explicitly the Word embodied by a person. An individual preacher also connotes the sharing of the Word from one person to another. The traditional model also highlights proclamation by a person gifted to do so. The Spirit works in the communication of an individual preacher, to be sure, in ways that can

overcome the limits of the medium. But the limits of the individual medium can also be overcome by occasionally varying it. No single medium is a perfect expression of the gospel. Adding to the tradition of an individual preacher, though, with the occasional balancing offered by plurality and collaboration makes sure that no single medium dominates the communication of the gospel.

Practical considerations also support individual preaching as the appropriate and usual custom. Collaboration takes considerable time and energy, making it unreasonable to practice every week. Another reason for only occasional collaboration in preaching is that churches have a limited number of potential partners with whom a preaching partnership should be fashioned. As preaching and collaboration require skills that not everyone has, the supply of potential preaching partners in a congregation is limited. The congregation commissions its preaching pastors and expects the custom of individual preaching. And only occasional variation of the medium is necessary to expand what the medium communicates. Individual preaching should remain primary, while occasional collaborative preaching provides balance to the medium in ways faithful to the gospel.

Collaborative Preaching as a Practice of Faithful Relationship

Collaborative preaching embodies mutual relationship, which is the form of living to which we are summoned by the triune God. Catherine Mowry LaCugna claims that the doctrine of the Trinity, “which is the specifically Christian way of speaking about God, summarizes what it means to participate in the life of God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit.”⁸ God as revealed in

⁸ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God With Us* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) 1.

covenant with Israel, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and in the gift of the Spirit is the eternal nature of God, existing not in or for itself, but existing as turned toward another.⁹ Humans are limited in capacity for relationship by embodiment and location and language, but our purpose and future is to accept and approach the divine existence which is for another.¹⁰ When humans experience mutual and generous relationships with one another, as pointed toward by the Trinity, we grow deeper in knowledge of God's nature and the nature of all reality in relation to God. While traditional individual preaching fashions relationship unilaterally between the preacher and hearers, collaborative preaching models the kind of mutual relationship to which we are called by Christian faith, and that faithful form of relationship becomes part of the preaching itself.

Miroslav Volf identifies the movement toward relationship to be the purpose of the Christian Church, gathered together as the community of grace.¹¹ The Church, seeking to follow God as made known in Jesus Christ, is called to resist human tendencies toward individualism, as well as to embrace and embody communality for the world.¹² This communion of the people of God is "the ecclesial dimension" reflecting the eschatological dimension for all creation, in which all are ultimately unified in praise to the glory of God.¹³ The communion of the Church, as such a reflection, also functions practically to open up every person to others, so that every person "can reflect something of the eschatological communion of the entire people of God with the triune God in a unique way through the relations in which

⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰ Ibid., 305.

¹¹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998) 181.

¹² Ibid., 198-200.

¹³ Ibid., 267.

that person lives.”¹⁴ The Church bears the purpose of bringing together as a reflection of the communion that God wills, expresses in Jesus Christ, and guides by the Holy Spirit. Therefore collaborative preaching helps the Church, in the very gospel it proclaims, practice its purpose, the embodiment of mutual relationships as a communion reflecting God’s aspirations for us and all the world.

While the medium of traditional preaching suggests that the Christian life is an individual enterprise, collaborative preaching packages proclamation in the form of mutual relationship. The Trinity reveals relationship as inherent to God’s nature, activity, and purpose in ways that are underserved by the exclusive practice of individual preaching. The triune God revealed in scripture’s big story witnesses that relationship is essential to the nature, activity, and purpose of God in Creation. In Jesus Christ we encounter God initiating, developing, and reconciling relationships between people and between people and God. Preaching collaboratively includes relationship as part of the inspired communication, present in the sermon’s conversation as well as in the unspoken but visible forms of connection. By occasionally embodying relationship in the medium of preaching, the proclamation of the gospel better includes and resembles how God in Christ intends for us to be.

Collaborative Preaching as a Practice of The Priesthood of All Believers

In addition to embodying faithful relationship, collaborative preaching practices the Reformation notion of “the priesthood of all believers,” which resists the exclusivity and hierarchy that always preaching individually can fashion. Martin Luther resisted the Church

¹⁴ Ibid., 282.

drawing lines between people that could raise some above others, citing Peter's claim, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). It is not that some Christians are of the "Spiritual Estate," as Luther elaborated, while others are not, for there is no difference between them except the office they are given. We are all priests, said Luther, and "no one may put himself forward without consent to do that which we have all alike the power to do."¹⁵ John Calvin arrived at the principle by a somewhat different route, claiming that the priestly role is Christ's, and that while no earthly creature is worthy of holiness, those who believe in Christ and give themselves to God are Christ's companions in the priestly office.¹⁶ The ultimate purpose of all the faithful was understood by the reformers in the way revealed to John of Patmos: "You [Christ] have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth" (Revelation 5:10). According to the "priesthood of all believers," all in Christ are, paraphrasing the words of Paul, one body, united by the one gospel and one faith and one baptism, each of us possessing the right and purpose to spread the good news and usher forth the reign of God on earth.

While the priesthood of all believers can underwrite the equal right and potential of all people of faith to spread the gospel, it does not proffer that all are made or gifted the same, nor that everyone should preach the Word. As Paul explained in Romans 12:4, the one body of Christ has many members, "and not all the members have the same function." Members of the

¹⁵ Martin Luther, "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," Hanover Historical Texts Projects, trans. Karl Adolf Buchheim and Henry Wace, last modified December 31, 1996, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/luthad.html>.

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960). 2.15.6.

body of Christ in the Church have different gifts, including prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, and leadership. Luther and Calvin both argued that all the faithful have the right and potential for spreading the gospel, but that not everyone has the particular gift for preaching. Calvin believed God uses the Church to call particular people – namely those gifted with faith, presence, and proclamation – to offices of ministry, commissioning some to ministry of preaching.¹⁷ Luther explained that “though it is true that we are all equally priests... we cannot, nor, if we could, ought we all to minister and teach publicly.”¹⁸ While everyone, according to the priesthood of all believers, has the right and potential for priestly function, not everyone should exercise that priestly function in the form of preaching. Collaborative preaching maintains that responsibility for preaching remain in the ordained pastor’s office, while not excluding others who may have compelling gifts for preaching from the practice.

While the Church as the body of Christ discerns and assigns the office of pastor, according to Calvin, the Word of Christian preaching is not defined by its particular messenger, but by the Christ who is preached. Faithful preaching is done, according to Luther, “when the Christian liberty which we have from Christ Himself is rightly taught, and we are shown in what manner all we Christians are kings and priests, and how we are lords of all things, and may be confident in whatever we do in the presence of God is pleasing and acceptable to Him.”¹⁹ Those who can serve as a conduit for Christ, and show how the gospel calls and compels us all, are the ones gifted for the role of preaching. One could make a case that lay preaching partners who possess a strong faith and gifts for preaching are particularly situated to show

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.3.6-7.

¹⁸ Luther, “Address to the Christian Nobility.”

¹⁹ Ibid.

how the gospel calls and compels us all. An occasional practice of collaborative preaching visibly expands the circle of preachers and gives appropriate nuance to the lines of ordained office in a congregation, in ways aligned with the priesthood of all believers.

The Reformation call for a priesthood of all believers supports collaborative preaching while maintaining individual preaching as the usual practice. Individual preaching carries the inspired power of the Word, but should not, as an exclusive practice, mistakenly communicate that the priestly call and function rests only with those whom the Church calls to pastoral office. Collaborative preaching breaks the pattern of individuality in the pulpit, delivering us from its unintended idolatry. The reformed understanding of the priesthood of all believers also cautions against the idolatry of entirety, as not everyone can or should preach. Regular preaching should remain the responsibility of a gifted and trained individual called by the Church. Occasional collaborative preaching with other gifted individuals communicates the sharing of the gospel as a collective calling and responsibility, while equipping disciples for doing so, faithful to reformed principles about the priesthood of believers.

Homiletical Movements Toward an Entirely Collaborative Preaching Journey

Inspired by both the centrality of relationships and the priesthood of all believers, the field of homiletics has shifted attention, in recent generations, to the dynamics of power and function in preaching, inviting exploration of the ways sermons are developed and delivered. Explorations have included the ways that conversation, collaboration, and community can be embodied in the sermon process.

Certain homileticians have resisted the way that traditional preaching isolates power and have embraced the priesthood of all believers in the sermon development process. Dietrich Ritschl identified the structural flaw of the traditional preaching medium, which isolates the preacher and makes preaching a “dispensing of power.”²⁰ The preacher and congregation are equally part of the priesthood of all believers, Ritschl claims, sharing the responsibility of edification, for which each have been given gifts.²¹ Preaching is receiving power, not dispensing it. Therefore, preachers should not be isolated as the sole teachers or celebrated theologians, but should be situated as brothers and sisters under the Word with discernment as a joint task. Ritschl offers an image of preachers and congregation members as learners together, in which the preacher actively learns with and from the congregation.²² When preachers and congregation members learn and discern scripture together, the Spirit is given even more room to work upon and within the priesthood of all believers.

Inspired by the active role and responsibility of the community in preaching, the field of homiletics has explored collaborative methods for interpreting scripture. Invitations to the sermon journey have been extended in a variety of ways, including lectionary Bible study groups, an interactive and conversational style of preaching, and post-sermon discussion groups.²³ John S. McClure described a process of “collaborative preaching” in which a variety of interpretive voices are lifted up by studying the Bible together and talking about what is has to

²⁰ Dietrich Ritschl, *A Theology of Proclamation* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960) 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

²² *Ibid.*, 155.

²³ Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 39. Rose references Clyde Reid’s emphasis on breaking free of a sermon as one-way communication, allowing for discussion and response. She also cites Gene E. Bartlett’s emphasis on the active participation of the congregation in the sermon’s encounter with God as justification for a conversational preaching event that recognizes and makes space for the diversity of people and voices present.

say to us today.²⁴ McClure laid compelling groundwork for the importance of multiple interpretive voices, but his proposal might be more appropriately named “collaborative interpretation,” because he stops short of suggesting that those multiple voices should be present in all their embodied particularity in the sermon event in the sanctuary. McClure’s model favored the pastor as “the collector” of voices and “the decider” of the proclamation’s focus.²⁵ O. Wesley Allen suggested a similar approach to sermon development, which he referred to as “conversational preaching,” in which the pastor leads interpretive conversations with congregation members and then gathers and shapes the sermon in ways that reflect the conversation.²⁶ Some homiletical explorations like those of McClure and Allen have highlighted the value of collectivity and conversation in the interpretive process, but have stopped short of suggesting that sermons should be crafted and delivered by more than one person.

The impulse to keep the craft and delivery of sermons in the hands of an individual is justifiable on grounds that collaborative communication is challenging and laborious to craft. It can also risk producing a cloudy message, as anyone who has tried to write a collaborative statement can attest. Other obstacles stand in the way of writing and delivering sermons collaboratively, like precedent, expectations, and worship spaces crafted for individual preaching. These obstacles to crafting and proclaiming collaboratively, however, can and must be overcome with focus and effort. The medium of sermon delivery is central to the message it

²⁴ John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) 24.

²⁵ John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 73. The pastor, in McClure’s model, serves as host of the roundtable pulpit discussion who then records the discussion and sets it to conversational language in the sermon.

²⁶ O. Wesley Allen, Jr., *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) 39.

carries. Therefore, the medium of a sermon should occasionally reinforce the priesthood of all believers in relationship, as does the gospel itself.

While some homileticians have pushed conversation and collaboration in the interpretive process, others have explored the spirit of conversation and collaboration in the event of preaching in worship. David Lose identified “participatory preaching,” which can take a variety of forms for preaching focused on making the biblical story lively, interactive, and useful.²⁷ Doug Pagitt described a “progressional dialogue,” in which relationship and understanding grow through discussion, and the process better reflects the power of the Body of Christ to listen and respond to God’s Word together.²⁸ Here the preacher facilitates interpretation as congregational conversation, and the process of interpretation in community becomes the proclamation itself. Lucy Atkinson Rose offered a truly communal ecclesiology and model for preaching, using a particular “in-the-round” setting which she calls “roundtable church.”²⁹ The act of preaching can embody inclusion and the honoring of one another, Rose said, through a style that is multi-voiced, honest, and side-by-side at a round table together.³⁰ In the “participatory church,” “progressional dialogue,” and “roundtable church” models, the preacher elevates the power of community conversation, which functions as the proclamation itself.

These meaningful models for dialogical and egalitarian sermon delivery have overcome the limits of the individual sermon medium, but at the potential expense of other important

²⁷ David J. Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the Word – and Our Preaching – is Changing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013) 103.

²⁸ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) 229.

²⁹ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 117.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

and faithful elements of interpretation and proclamation. In these models, the process of reading and studying and interpretation is limited to the time of worship. But the deep work of interpreting Scripture often requires time for meditation and discernment. The “progressional dialogue” and “roundtable church” models can benefit from skillful pastoral moderation, but risk a proclamation that is a breadth of ideas at the expense of the depth that comes with careful focus and time. These models can also serve to prioritize the voices of members who are quick to speak at the expense of those who want to be patient and careful in formulating their ideas. They presume congregations with a high level of facility with scripture and a desire to engage in conversation in worship, which is not to be assumed. Such an approach can alienate those uncomfortable with public conversation and sharing. In addition to these risks of a process of interpretation and proclamation that is entirely communal, the models are also impractical and inapplicable to many congregational and sanctuary contexts. The dialogical and roundtable models of preaching are impossible to pull off as egalitarian in sanctuaries with 100 or more in attendance. Each contributes to collaboration in preaching, but seem to build toward and leave room for a model of collaborative preaching that is more versatile, scalable, and practical.

The field of homiletics, inspired by the power of relationships and the priesthood of all believers, has recently explored the ways that conversation, collaboration, and community can be embodied in the sermon process. For mostly practical reasons, these explorations have focused on a part or parts of the sermon journey being conversational, collaborative, or communal, and stopped short of an entirely and consistently collaborative sermon journey. The models of collaboration that have been explored and suggested can be described as either

“collaborative study and interpretation” or “collaborative proclamation,” but none thus far recommend the whole sermon journey as a continuous collaboration. Moved incrementally by the power of collaboration in each step of the sermon journey, I have discovered that an entirely collaborative preaching experience is inspired and beneficial to parishioners, pastors, and preaching partners.

The Evolution of Collaborative Preaching

at Winnetka Presbyterian Church, Winnetka, IL, 2013-2015

The occasional practice of collaborative preaching in my pastoring life has grown out of my own listening in Bible study and worship. While pastor at Winnetka Presbyterian Church in Winnetka, IL, I began a weekly narrative-lectionary-based Bible study in 2013. Often, I would discover my own hearing of scripture assisted by the insights and experiences of the group, which I would make explicit in the study and resulting sermon. When a particularly insightful interpretive comment would arise from the study group, I would instinctively and half-jokingly say something like, “What are you doing this Sunday?” My question implied, of course, that something valuable for preaching was happening, and emerging from someone other than me. Inevitably such a suggestive question would get a good laugh, though, because it evoked anxiety as a departure from the comfort zones of our preaching tradition. This lectionary Bible study became a rhythmic and fruitful part of my preaching process, in a form resembling McClure’s model of collaborative interpretation. Sometimes this approach yielded such obvious and important inspiration that it begged for more reflection and attention.

One particular week of study revealed for me how the Spirit uses togetherness and relationship to illumine scripture's truth in important and even transformative ways. For example, in November 2013 I walked into Bible study with some preconceived preaching notions about 1 Kings 19, focusing on the "sheer silence" or the "still small voice" in which Elijah heard the voice of God.³¹ Before the group Bible study, my preparations heard the text prompting us to explore the spaces in which we, like Elijah, might escape and listen for God's whispers, as fears and distractions drift away. But the group took our interpretive discussion in a very different and inspired direction. After we prayed for illumination and read the scripture together, I asked, as I do every week, "What do you hear God speaking through this text?" A senior woman spoke matter-of-factly, "why does the text say, 'and God wasn't in something,' when I thought God is in everything?" She was referring, of course, to the cataclysmic events that occurred as Elijah waited for God to pass by, and the scriptures' refrain, "but God was not in" the wind/earthquake/fire.³² A woman's stirring prompted the group to explore the collective discernment about theodicy, in conversation with the text and our various experiences.

The conversation yielded a variety of perspectives about where God is in disasters and tragedies, but it was the way the discussion moved, as a product of our relationship together, that felt inspired. One woman in the group said, "I don't believe God is the author of things like disasters or death. God is not a puppeteer making a play about awful things." This prompted another member of the group to remember the teaching of Fred Rogers regarding tragedy.

³¹ In 1 Kings 19:12, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translates that a "sound of sheer silence" encountered Elijah, while the King James Version (KJV) referred to the same event as a "still small voice."

³² 1 Kings 19:11-12.

Rogers was told by his mother to “look for the helpers and all the helping” as evidence that God is present in every way that love and compassion break through the awful things. Another participant processed this out loud, “This is a lot to think about. I’ve blamed God for lots of awful things in my life. Imagining God in everything, as I have, has frankly made it hard to believe. So, I’m grateful for this other kind of thought about God, because it feels a little bit like a way through a stuck place for me.” I was mindful of the extraordinary and tender place our conversation had taken us, sensing the illumination therein, when near the close of our study, another woman shared, “I didn’t know we were ever allowed to think that God is not in everything.” I had prepared to preach a sermon on listening for God, but our study’s collaboration pushed me and us to the deeper space that precedes our listening, as participants asked, “Can I trust this God to whom this text summons me to listen?”

I think we all left study that day in a state of wonder and gratitude, with a strong sense that God’s Word had found us in a way that was sorely needed. We had just experienced an illuminated conversation that needed to be witnessed. I did my best to preach with this new focus to which we had been led together. I wrote a new sermon entitled “God is Not in Everything,” one that many people afterwards told me was a moving witness that they remember with gratitude frequently. I was moved by the whole experience, which has informed my preaching life as a humbling reminder of the powers of togetherness and additional perspectives.

This experience was an overt example of the way the Word can emerge in a group Bible study on the sermon text. Experiences like these happen to preachers in lectionary Bible study all the time, and I began to marvel and cherish the variety of voices and the power of

relationship in hearing the scriptures. My sermons grew stronger because my own witness gained access to insights, perspectives, and experiences of the living God to which the scriptures guide. The inspired interpretations and witnesses from Bible students over time demonstrated the priesthood of all believers. The illuminations that emerged through conversation demonstrated the stirring power of interpersonal relationship. Our collectivity was expressive all the while as we contemplated what a text was proclaiming. I became increasingly explicit in my sermons about the ways that certain themes or moves came to me through the perspectives of others in the congregation. I noticed that Bible study participants started to feel a greater sense of investment in the preaching journey each week. After a wise interpretation or witness during Bible study, it would sometimes be said, looking at me, "That was a great insight, maybe that will show up in the pulpit on Sunday." The study conversations started to move toward Sunday worship, and so we followed where they were leading.

Eventually, I became so persuaded by the power of collaboration in interpretation that it felt appropriate to explore the power of collaboration in proclamation. The Winnetka worship staff and I developed a practice of welcoming these riches more explicitly into worship, which we came to call "Weaving Our Stories [With God's]." Inspired by the power of the voices that such study together unearthed, I sought ways that those voices from the congregation could be embodied in a "collaborative preaching" event. In this practice, I identified a partner in preaching, with whom I prepared a sermon collaboratively, and structured the delivery with a short pastor's introduction followed by the preaching partner's weaving of her/his testimony that the scripture's claim is true. I confess that my appropriation of "Weaving Our Stories" began with the idea that the responsibilities between pastor and partner would be divided up

clearly, with myself as the Bible interpreter, and the congregation member as the giver of testimony. But in just about every instance, the invited congregation member took the sacred responsibility of interpretation seriously for herself or himself, in consultation with me, as part of the task of weaving one's story together with God's. Listening to my partners' testimonies yielded an understanding that they were preachers, too, and I felt that helping them to develop their voices of faith was in fulfillment of my pastoral calling in their lives. "Weaving Our Stories" at Winnetka Presbyterian Church was a widely-appreciated practice and its 6 iterations each offered an inspired and meaningful proclamation.

One of those instances proved to be one of the most profound and powerful revelations in preaching I have ever experienced as hearer or preacher. In January 2014, I partnered with a woman leader who wove her story together with the story of Jesus' turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. She and I met twice to discuss the passage in preparation, and she was drawn to the notion that the wedding ceremony had as its purpose the formation of a family, and the wedding was the celebration of all that God had brought together, and all the promise it held. She identified with the feeling the guests must have had when the wine ran out, symbolizing the end of the celebration, leaving them to wonder if the joy was gone too. My partner remembered the day that the wine ran out for her family, when 15 years ago they learned their beloved daughter was killed in a car accident, leaving them feeling like the joy was gone forever. God did not replenish the wine in an evening, as her suffering was intense and overwhelming. But over years, being part of an abiding and loving church community helped her see reminders that God and her daughter were still present and active, by the power of the Spirit. The Church as the Body of Christ, called together to bear grace and compassion for the

lowly and the lost in his name, helped gradually to transform her grief, and enable her to heal, honor her daughter's memory, and even feel joy again. When her family's celebration had seemed to run out and end, though they would never be the same, their capacity for gratitude was, by grace and by Christ, replenished. This was my preaching partner's testimony to the gospel John reveals in the story of the wedding at Cana, and it was a proclamation that continued to preach to the community through its struggles to come.

Just three weeks later, in February 2014, this Winnetka Presbyterian Church family went through another excruciating tragedy when one of its children was struck and killed by a drunk driver. We had just heard, in a collaborative sermon from a member who also knew inexplicable loss, what a church can do and mean in the face of such tragedy. This coincidence was experienced by us all as haunting and inspiring, as if one expression of suffering and healing was somehow preparing us for a new echo of unbearable pain. The echoes of that sermon on the wedding at Cana were still in our ears, reminding us of the power and importance of bearing the grace of Christ for one another.

The next day was Sunday, and we gathered the grieving congregation after worship to share in the pain and pray. As we did, one of the teenagers said, "I don't know why God did this, but I guess everything happens for a reason, and maybe one day we will know." This was an understandable attempt to interpret the tragedy theologically, but then, another voice spoke. One of the participants recalled toward me, "that sermon you preached a while back, the 'God isn't in everything' one, I think this is one of those things that God isn't in." In that terrible moment, the Spirit was still speaking through a sermon I was credited with giving. But I was especially mindful of the way that particular Word had come – not through me, but

through the insights of the Bible study group and the tender witnesses they brought to the scripture's truth. I used 1 Kings 19 as the scripture for the homily at that child's memorial service. I came to understand and trust that there was something deep and purposeful the Word spoke through our collaborative interpretation of this text, and it continued to speak when we most needed to hear it.

An episode of collaborative interpretation in group Bible study and an episode of collaborative preaching in worship continued to reverberate in that church community and in all our hearts in ways that were unmistakably inspired. The church's priesthood of all believers, working cooperatively with its pastor, yielded insight and testimony that would help God carry the congregation through dark times. Bible study discussion resembling Allen's concept of "collaborative preaching" had generated timely insight regarding theodicy. Proclaiming the gospel with a member of the congregation during worship, a modified and more deliberate practice of Rose's model of "roundtable church," generated testimony regarding God's presence made manifest in the Church's resembling of Christ's compassion for one another. These collaborative practices each helped bear the light of the gospel in a congregation's darkness in a way that included and exceeded the capacity of the professional pastor to do. And if collaboration sometimes benefits both interpretation and proclamation, then it came to seem reasonable to me that the whole sermon journey could be shared. I found myself moved to a new sense of faith by collaboration in preaching, seeking more ways to build its power and potential into my preaching life.

Collaborative Preaching Explored

at Saint Luke's Presbyterian Church, Dunwoody, GA, 2016-2017

Upon receiving a new pastoral call to Saint Luke's Presbyterian Church in Dunwoody, Georgia, I continued the exploring the possibilities of collaboration by conducting four collaborative sermons during the 2016-2017 church year. All four partners I selected were leaders in the church, either as active elders or program leaders. The partners included two women and two men. These sermons were prepared in partnership over several weeks, guided by a schedule designed to facilitate collaboration at every step of the sermon journey.³³ The model of collaborative preaching used includes five steps – selecting the text, reading the text, studying the text, creating the sermon, and preparing to deliver the sermon – each catalyzed by an in-person meeting with my preaching partner. While other forms of collaboration are possible in the digital age, each step was initiated by an in-person meeting and conversation, maximizing the possibilities of interpersonal relationship including non-verbal communication. A regular meeting time helped with scheduling and allowed sufficient time for the work between meetings.

In these collaborations, I partnered with a former nurse and chaplain on the story and prayer of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:9-2:10), with a telecom executive on the story of Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:1-24), with a lawyer on Jesus Calling the Fishermen (Luke 5:1-11), and with an HR executive on Jesus & his messianic identity (Luke 7:18-35).³⁴ The sermons each took a different form, based on the way our collaborative witness had unfolded together,

³³ See Appendix A for the way those collaborations were structured.

³⁴ For links to the collaborative sermons at Saint Luke's in 2016-2017, see Appendix B.

and our proclamation in partnership was delivered at both the 8:30am chapel service and the 11am sanctuary service at the church on Sunday. These four collaborative sermons were preached on two Old Testament and two New Testament texts. Evaluations of the sermons were done through conversations and interviews with colleagues, preaching partners, and members of the congregation.

The church's context proved relevant to the practice and analysis of collaborative preaching. Saint Luke's, founded in 1969, is situated in the center of the largely residential suburban city of Dunwoody, Georgia (pop. 47,000), just north of Atlanta. The church consists of about 800 members with an average of 350 people attending Sunday worship services. The congregation's primary demographics are white, affluent, well-educated families with children, although the membership spans across generations. The congregation is theologically, ideologically, and politically mixed, but lacks the diversity of race and class characteristic of Dunwoody.³⁵ The church has a missional identity, emphasizing outreach to those experiencing hardship in the congregation, in the suburbs, in the city, in the region, and in the world. The Saint Luke's mission statement emphasizes spiritual growth, service, and sharing the gospel.³⁶ Saint Luke's brings assets to a practice of collaborative preaching – like a generally well-educated congregation that is comfortable with one another. Saint Luke's demographics

³⁵ "Dunwoody, GA Population: Census 2010," CensusViewer, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://censusviewer.com/city/GA/Dunwoody>. 2010 Census data reports Dunwoody demographics by race were 69.8% White, 12.8% African American, 10.3% Hispanic or Latino, 11.1% Asian, 2.3% Multi-racial, and 3.7% other races. According to its 2015 Annual Report, Saint Luke's demographics by race were 91% White, 4% Asian, 3% Hispanic or Latino, and 2% African American.

³⁶ "Saint Luke's Presbyterian Church Mission & Vision Statements," Saint Luke's Presbyterian Church, last modified January 2017, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://slpres.org/about-us/history/missionvision/>. The Saint Luke's Mission Statement, adopted in 2010, reads: "Responding to God's call and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we invite all to join us in knowing, serving, and sharing Jesus Christ here and around the world."

present opportunities for connection-building across generations and between busy people within the church walls. Saint Luke's demographics also offer opportunities for connection-building between parishioners and other members of the community, which developing voices of faith can potentially help foster. Collaborative preaching is a tool that serves the church's goals for spiritual growth, service, and sharing the gospel.

Receipt of Collaborative Preaching at Saint Luke's, 2016-2017

Feedback from the four entirely collaborative sermons at Saint Luke's highlighted the value of the practice, immediately validating the medium of collaboration. The first sermon especially generated a striking amount of positive response from the congregation regarding the medium itself. One church member remarked about the difference and surprise of watching people preach together, "I loved this, and I had no idea someone like me could preach with someone like you." Another parishioner described the value of having people of both genders preaching together: "seeing a man and a woman preaching together was powerful." Other feedback amplified the potential of this form of preaching to present different points of view in the same sermon: "I was struck that a sermon could reflect two viewpoints in conversation, it felt new and interesting." One astute observer even spoke about the experience theologically, noting that "it was great to see you both side by side, pastor and layperson, representing the priesthood of all believers." The medium, it would seem, is indeed part of the message, and the medium itself became more visible when varied in such a way.

Responses to collaborative preaching at Saint Luke's also bore witness to the power of the preaching partner's witness. One member of the congregation shared, "what a gift it was

to learn more about her story, much of which I did not know, and how it informs her faith.”

Another member of the congregation remarked about the preaching partner after worship, “I just knew him as a funny guy who does a lot for the church, but he has something serious to say, too, which I was glad to hear.” Preaching with a pastor in worship allowed new sides of the preaching partner to be seen, helping connections between the partner and the community to deepen. Church members also found preaching partners to be very relatable, maybe even in ways that would be hard for a professional pastor to approximate. One congregation member wrote a note to one of the preaching partners after worship, which said, “I am so grateful to you for opening up and talking about the loss of your mother, and sharing your thoughts and insights about our call to share the gospel, which I found very relatable.” Each preaching partner brought gifts and experience to the sermon journey, and feedback has indicated that one of those gifts they bring to the congregation’s receipt of preaching is “being one of us.”

Preaching collaboratively with church leaders certainly leveraged the sense of relationship between the preaching partner and the congregation. The congregation becomes more invested in the new thing they are receiving, engaging the sermon with a heightened sense of wonder and trust. The preaching partner and members of the congregation have worshipped together, cleaned up after a meal together, attended a funeral together, and served on a mission trip together. “I was so excited and anxious for my friend, who was about to preach in church, as I could not wait to hear what he would have to say about this story I knew well,” remarked one church leader. Each preaching partner had been part of the Saint Luke’s congregation for about 20 years, which gives them intimate knowledge of the church and people to whom they are preaching, and makes them a trusted witness in the eyes of the

congregation. I overheard one parishioner say to a preaching partner after the worship service, “I’ve loved you for a long time, and after hearing God’s Word from you, I think I love you even more.” Collaborative preaching works with partners already related to members of the congregation, and those relationships function in preaching. Lucy Atkinson Rose notes that the gap between a preacher and the congregation can stifle the faithful proclamation of the gospel.³⁷ Collaborating on a sermon with a member of the congregation can serve to bridge that crucial gap between professional preacher and hearers, and facilitate the communication. Feedback suggested that even occasional collaboration in preaching helps a congregation feel more connected to sermons, as well as to each other.

In addition, preaching collaboratively offered important perspectives on a text from within the congregation. For instance, preaching with an insightful woman on Hannah’s prayer for Samuel added the voice and perspective of a woman and mother to the congregation’s hearing of that text. This preaching partner’s sensitivities to the central character led me to hear the desperation and doubt in Hannah’s voice when she prayed, highlighting God as the One who heard her cries and delivered her from hopelessness. Another example of this emerged in the second collaborative sermon on the story of Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath. That preaching partnership was between two men. In the middle of our journey of interpretation, my partner wondered what an actual widow would think if she were asked to give up her family’s last provision. He knew four widows in the congregation, and felt moved in his relationships with them to ask them what that might have felt like in their experience of widowhood. While I worried that his asking was invasive and insensitive, the communal

³⁷ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 93.

context of such a request made the inquiry just the opposite. Each widow was honored to be asked for the sake of a sermon journey, and contributed meaningful witness to his hearing and interpretation of the widow's story with Elijah. The third partner drew on his experience having been buoyed by the church during deep losses in his life to testify about the ways in which we share and receive the gospel's good news. The fourth partner drew on her experiences of giving and receiving care at the church as testimony that the good news regularly comes to us in the form of small, good things. When preaching partners come from the pews to the pulpit, as part of a congregational family, they bring the family's questions and the family's witness with them in an encounter with scripture, the result of which is powerful and trustworthy testimony.

Collaborative preaching offers preaching partners a powerful experience in their spiritual development. After giving a collaborative sermon, each preaching partner highlighted similar aspects of the experience. Each partner noted the value of the deepest dive into scripture they had ever taken. Each marveled in retrospect at how the Spirit worked in the process, captured in the witness of one partner, who said: "When we started, it felt strange and I felt unsure, but slowly, as you gently guided us along, our work seemed to gain momentum, until it felt much more comfortable and like a real sermon." All four partners also noted how affirming it was to take a risk, rooted in scripture, and come out with a witness that benefitted others. One claimed, "This has been one of the milestone moments in my spiritual path, and I will never forget it."

Also lifted up by preaching partners was the experience of having sustained relationship and partnership with the senior pastor of their church. "The only time I have ever spent that

much time with a pastor is on a mission trip, and that's with lots of other people." The experience fostered a sense of spiritual growth as well as a meaningful relationship between pastor and partner. One partner shared with me, "I will never forget this experience, nor my mentor on the journey!" Developing stronger relationships with church leaders is a significant result of collaborative preaching.

Building a practice of collaborative preaching in the congregation has also served to foster relationships between those who served as preaching partners. They paid close attention to one another's preaching, supported each other through the process, and learned from each other. There are many layers of benefit that collaborative preaching has to offer the pastor's partners, including a deeper relationship with other church leaders rooted in a significant spiritual experience.

In my experience with collaborative preaching, the practice has also served to enrich and enliven my preaching life. Collaborating on a sermon is more difficult and laborious, commanding a pastor's time, careful discernment, sensitivity, humility, accountability, creativity, and trust. These are virtues worth cultivating in all preaching we pastors do. Collaboration also serves to highlight the limits of my own perspective and ideas. In each collaborative sermon, my preaching partner brought insight to the text, and experience to support it, that enhanced my own understanding. It became part of the preaching to witness to the ways that each partner's understanding led to further insights for the other. In my individual preaching life, I am now better formed to ask questions of a text from a different perspective, and to think about where other insights to a text might lead me. I am becoming a

more faithful and more versatile preacher because I now practice collaborative preaching occasionally.

An occasional practice of collaborative preaching benefits congregations, preaching partners, and pastors. The medium of the sermon is expanded to include the gospel's proclamation that the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ is given to us all, for us all to share. Collaboration models interpersonal relationship and mutual upbuilding, which are faithful fulfillments of our shared calling in Christ. Collaboration between a pastor, a trained and experienced spiritual guide, and a member of the congregation helps those preaching partners develop skills for interpretation and proclamation, helps confer upon them a sense of authority in the priesthood of all believers, helps them fulfill their calling to share the gospel. Collaboration also helps pastors develop capacities for hearing the gospel from a variety of perspectives, and helps refine their overall preaching life. One Saint Luke's member commented after a collaborative sermon, "I hope we are going to continue this collaborative preaching experience. There is something special in it." There is indeed. Therefore collaborative preaching will become a regular experience at Saint Luke's, targeting 6 more collaborations in 2017-2018.

Reflections on the Collaborative Sermon Development Process

The preaching partnership is a rich and nuanced experience, and should be carefully and trustfully cultivated by the pastor. Important considerations in developing an occasional practice of collaborative preaching include: 1) deciding if collaborative preaching is for you, 2) clearly communicating the practice and rationale to the congregation, 3) selecting preaching

partners with care, 4) selecting texts with good potential for the partnership, 5) initiating the partnership with covenant, relationship, and expectations, 6) adapting to the movements of the Spirit in the collaboration, 7) identifying an appropriate form for the sermon as the witness of the partnership to the scripture, 8) setting the collaborative proclamation appropriately in your worship space, 9) rehearsing the collaborative sermon together in the worship space, and 10) refining the process iteratively with the benefit of feedback from partners and parishioners. Attention to these considerations will help establish healthy collaborations for fruitful collaborative sermon journeys.

First, it is important to decide if collaborative preaching is for you and your congregation. Collaborative preaching is a generative practice for those willing and able to make the investment. Pastors have different gifts, and not all will feel called to this kind of preaching. Collaborative preaching should be conducted by pastors who are willing to invite others onto the pedestal as equal partners, pastors who can exhibit humility and trust and adapt as the Spirit moves through the process. Pastors who engage in this practice should know themselves, especially their proclivities, aversions, tendencies, and blind spots. Those who can give the process the humility, adaptability, and trust that it needs will find the experience meaningful and inspiring.

Secondly, as with any change in the sacred space of worship, the congregation should be informed and involved in a move to occasional collaborative preaching. In the case of Saint Luke's, I introduced the concept to the Creative Worship Team, the Worship Committee, and the Session (the leading body), before embarking on collaborative preaching. Because collaborative preaching is different, and because differences in worship can be unsettling, extra

care in managing this change should be taken. The change was announced to the congregation by email in advance, as well as through verbal announcement at the beginning of worship. The introduction of collaborative preaching can go smoothly when well communicated.

Third, a preaching partner has a great bearing on the collaboration, making selection of partners important. The ideal preaching partner will love scripture, value study, have gifts for discerning what God is saying, push for depth and quality, communicate well, and deliver a witness creatively and with conviction. Preaching partners should be able to articulate their points of view, and be able to adapt and compromise for the sake of a faithful collaborative proclamation. Church leaders often are called into leadership for qualities that make for good collaboration, witness and preaching. Placing church leaders in positions of witness can also strengthen their voices and connections with the congregation they lead. Partners need to commit significant time to the process, and the right people for this journey will do so. While each collaboration is different, selecting partners with the right skills and passions and time is crucial to an inspired partnership.

Fourth, selecting a scripture text with potential for the partnership can be beneficial. In each case of the four collaborative sermons at Saint Luke's, selecting a scripture text was guided in large part by the church's use of the Narrative Lectionary for worship. We decided each preaching opportunity based on the scheduled text, which determined the date of the sermon. Sometimes the texts seem to find us, of course, as in the case of my preaching the calling of the disciples with the elder for evangelism. Other times, texts that seem like a strange fit can work well for discernment in partnership.

A fifth consideration is that it is important to initiate the partnership with relationship, expectations, and covenant. Pastors should remember that every collaboration is different, because it involves a different person and a different relationship. It is essential to spend time building relationship and sharing together, so that the lay and ordained preachers can know each other and get a sense for where the other is coming from. Describing the whole process in detail, and agreeing on a preaching date, scripture text, and schedule of work are critical to do at the outset. A verbal commitment to partnership, honesty, and responsibility is an important way to initiate the process.

A sixth consideration is that, in my experience, there is benefit to modeling and facilitating the faithful and humble receiving of scripture's gifts, and adapting throughout the collaboration to the moving of the Spirit. The gathering for reading together may be the most significant step for the partnership, as it sets the tone for the work of collaboration. The pastor can make space for illuminated reading, embrace differences in what gets heard, and marvel at places of resonance. Every idea from pastor and partner can be mined and discussed and discerned. Establishing and maintaining openness and adaptability are important qualities for the pastor to bring to the partnership.

The study week presents challenges when working with partners not yet trained in biblical exegesis. Some of the tools available in a trained professional's preaching life – like a Greek New Testament or a scholarly textual commentary – may not be useful. Most study weeks I prepared by putting together some helpful and accessible study materials for our text, often including multiple translations to scan for textual issues, Bible dictionaries for context and understanding, and commentaries. At the end of our reading meeting, we would look at study

materials and talk about what they are and how to use them. Then we would allow our studies to help affirm the claim and shape of the text as we were hearing it together. We would try to leave the study gathering with a focus statement identifying what we heard the text saying, and any moves therein. The focus produced by our shared study would then help shape the writing and expounding we would do in the creative process. Collaboration between partners with two very different levels of experience in interpretation and proclamation presents challenges, particularly when it comes to familiarity with study tools, but the pastor can help bridge the gap by focusing attention on the most appropriate resources for the collaboration.

Seventh, the most significant and important challenge in the process of preaching collaboratively is deciding on a form for the sermon. There are at least two faithful forms to consider when using this model. The first is to shape the sermon like the scripture, leveraging its focus and moves. The second is related to the first (because the process is always rooted in scripture), but it shapes the sermon along the contours of the collaboration that has occurred. For example, in the first collaborative sermon, our collaboration unearthed two primary claims, one discovered by the partner which inspired the pastor to think about the text differently, and another discovered by the pastor which inspired the partner. And so we shaped the sermon in the form in which the Spirit seemed to move our process: 1) introduction to the text, 2) primary insight of the partner, 3) exposition of primary insight by the pastor, 4) secondary insight of the pastor, 5) exposition of secondary insight by the partner, and 6) concluding reflections on the text. As another illustration of this idea, in the third collaborative sermon our collaboration dove deeply into the text, and discovered rich resonance between the move of the scripture and the testimony of the preaching partner. So we shaped the sermon like the Spirit seemed to

move that process, moving like this: 1) introduction to the text by the pastor, 2) exposition on the text by the partner, 3) conclusion of the text by the pastor. The scripture and the collaboration itself can both help build the form of the sermon.

An eighth consideration is setting the collaborative proclamation appropriately in your worship space. While the site of a collaborative sermon is contingent upon the space of the sanctuary and chancel, we arrived at a setting with two preachers at the communion table. While there were practical benefits to this arrangement at Saint Luke's, hearers appreciated the symbolic value of preaching from the table that brings us together with Christ. I chose in each sermon to wear a suit with a stole, instead of a robe and stole, so that the pastor and partner would be similarly dressed, but it would be visibly recognized as a collaboration between a pastor and a layperson.

A ninth consideration is to remember that the collaborative sermon is typically a new experience for participants, so rehearsals in the space are critical. With each delivery, the shape and the flow of the sermon become more comfortable. Depending on the partner's comfort level with preaching and public speaking, the pastor may need to provide encouragement and assurance. Collaborative preaching is new for most pastors, too, and the relationship that has been developed by the sermon journey functions to support both partners in the preaching event.

Finally, refining the collaborative preaching process as you progress from one step to the next allows you to incorporate your self-learning and your learning about your own style of collaborative preaching into future partnerships. Creating healthy feedback loops with

preaching partners, Bible study groups, staff, and worship committees can help ensure that the next collaborative preaching experience is even more rich.

The experience of preaching collaboratively raises important considerations for the craft. My collaborative work so far has generated these considerations from my perspective, and there are surely others to be encountered, named, and accounted for. Careful attention to the important considerations in collaborative preaching can help the pastor function as a facilitator, making space for the Spirit to work in the collaboration, avoiding potential obstacles, and developing faithful and meaningful sermons that will benefit pastors, preaching partners, and congregation members.

Additional Possibilities for Collaborative Preaching

I feel like I have just scratched the surface of the potential for collaborative preaching, and anticipate future explorations and improvements. The first exploration arose when the last collaborative sermon produced a call to action, as my partner and I heard Jesus' admonition to spend less time criticizing and more time relating, and committed to building new relationships with resettled refugees. We invited the congregation to consider joining us in the new commitment we made, and received more than a dozen volunteers to do something new. By preaching with another leader in the congregation, new possibilities for preaching include new opportunities for faithful community leadership, which I intend to explore in further collaborations.

I will continue to explore possibilities for enriching collaboration and proclamation via this model. The third collaborative sermon, in which the scripture was on the topic of

evangelism (“from now on you will be catching people”), and the preaching partner was the church’s elder for evangelism, provided resonant space for preaching. I will continue to explore opportunities to invite leaders of particular aspects of church life to collaboratively preach a scripture that lifts up the themes of their call and work. Collaborative preaching has great potential to build leaders and bolster their leadership.

I will also continue to explore the potential of collaborative preaching to draw out the less-heard voices of a congregation. While preaching is not a calling for intense introverts, it is a fine calling for minority or marginalized voices in the congregation who might welcome a chance to be heard. It lets them be placed on a pedestal with a pastor interpreting scripture for the whole community. This can be a great way to lift up the voices of young people in the congregation, for instance. I think lifting up under-heard voices is an important use of collaborative preaching in contexts of privilege, like mine, and intend to explore this use of the model as well.

I also believe that collaboration can be expanded to include more than one partner using the same process and structure. Inviting a family to preach with a pastor, or a committee, or a youth group, or a mission trip group, has interesting possibilities. The most significant challenge would be the sharing of the proclamation itself. But this could take the form of conversation, adding perspectives and testimonies. While I think the symbol of collectivity and relationship is reflected in a single partnership, the symbol of a group proclamation would have its own resonance. I intend to explore these untapped potentials of the collaborative preaching model in future use.

Conclusion

The truth sought by Christian preaching is the good news, definitively revealed in Jesus the Christ, of God's relentless and redeeming love given for all. That gospel message which preaching delivers is collective in its content and in its address. Preaching collaboratively can help underscore the gospel as given to us all to share. Building an occasional practice of collaborative preaching yields significant benefits for congregations, preaching partners, and pastors. I recommend this particular collaborative practice that has brought fresh energy, perspective, and meaning to the congregation I serve and to my own preaching life. I believe that collaborative preaching makes new spaces for the Spirit to work upon pastor-preachers and the congregations we serve.

APPENDIX A

THE MODEL OF COLLABORATIVE PREACHING USED

AT SAINT LUKE'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 2016-2017

The particular model of collaborative preaching used includes five steps, each catalyzed by an in-person meeting with my preaching partner. While other forms of collaboration are possible in the digital age, each step can be initiated by an in-person meeting and conversation, maximizing the possibilities of interpersonal relationship including non-verbal communication. A regular meeting time helped with scheduling and allowed sufficient time for the work between meetings. The meetings were structured as followed:

- 5 weeks before sermon date – select a text together (1 hour):
 - a. Make covenant together
 - b. Select a text and confirm a preaching date
- 4 weeks before sermon date – read a text together (1 hour):
 - a. Conduct a divine reading of the text together
 - b. Share the insights and curiosities and challenges heard in the text.
 - c. Homework: divide up studies using Bible dictionaries, parallel Bibles, and commentaries (with a little orientation to these kinds of resources if they are new to the preaching partner).
- 3 weeks before sermon date – study a text together (2 hours):
 - Study the text together
 - Explore the text's claims and moves
 - Verify the text's claims and moves in conversation with commentaries

- Decide on a focus statement together that can guide creation of the sermon.
- Homework: each draft some preaching on the claim and moves of the text, including why you think this is true, in your experience, to be exchanged by email and read before the next session.
- 2 weeks before sermon date – create a sermon together (2 hours):
 - Explore each partner’s expositions, and follow the conversation where it leads (i.e. “your witness here resonated with me, and made me think about that as well”)
 - Consider and decide on the shape of the sermon
 - Decide on the sharing of the sermon’s delivery
 - Homework: build out the content of the sermon based on the work you’ve done together, approaching its final form.
- The week of the sermon – prepare to deliver a sermon together (1 hour):
 - Decide on the sermon’s final form
 - Decide on the space for sermon delivery
 - Practice giving the sermon together
- The week after giving the sermon – reflect on the experience together (either by meeting or by phone or email)
 - Reflect together on the process and how God worked in it for the partnership and the congregation

APPENDIX B

COLLABORATIVE SERMONS AT SAINT LUKE'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 2016-2017

1. 10/16/2016, "Preconceived Notions," 1 Samuel 1:1-2:10, Barbara Douglass and David Lower
 - a. <https://vimeo.com/187552988>

2. 11/6/2016, "Each Other," 1 Kings 17:1-24, David King and David Lower
 - a. <https://vimeo.com/190466710>

3. 1/29/2017, "Being Prepared," Luke 5:1-11, Sonny Jester and David Lower
 - a. <https://vimeo.com/201558115>

4. 2/12/2017, "Managing Expectations," Luke 7:18-35, Beth Eisenmesser and David Lower
 - a. <https://vimeo.com/203713305>

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