

Timothy Keller. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Viking, 2015. 309 pages. \$16.

Timothy Keller is an evangelical and a pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. He has authored numerous books that call for a reformed Christianity. In this book Keller turns his attention to the task of preaching and addresses the need to communicate the Gospel in a way that connects with both Christians and non-Christians who want not only to hear a word from God but also to see it embodied in the lives of those who proclaim it. The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 describes the commitment to preaching Scripture, defines expository preaching, and identifies it as the most effective way of communicating God's word. Part 2 explores the culture in which we live and offers guidelines on how to preach to this "late modern culture," as he calls it (122–123). Part 3 turns the reader's attention to the importance of the character and passion of the preacher.

Keller's homiletic theory and practice is based on evangelical writers like William Perkins, Alan Stibbs, Haddon Robinson, Brian Chapell, David Helm, and others (294–295). Since he believes expository preaching is the best way of communicating Scripture, he devotes time to identifying what it is. He defines it in the following way: "Expository preaching grounds the message in the text so that the sermon's points are points in the text, and it majors in the text's major ideas" (32). His preaching heroes are John Stott and Dick Lucas. They are "clear teachers of the text" (41). He believes, however, that expository preaching cannot focus exclusively on explaining and sharing information. It also must touch the heart and elicit emotion in order to move people to change.

Keller takes issue with some mainline perspectives on preaching. He disagrees with Craddock's philosophy of preaching that leaves the sermon open ended in order to allow listeners to "draw their own conclusions" since we live in a culture that does not accept the Bible (45). In contrast to that perspective, Keller's practice is simply to let the Bible defend itself by preaching the Bible (46). In one lengthy endnote, he tracks the mainline Protestant critique of the traditional sermon outline (305). In that same note he traces the development of the new homiletic basically relying on Tom Long's book *Witness of Preaching* to critique the different voices in that movement. Mainline homiletics were "scornful" of traditional expository preaching because it turned Scripture into a "box of ideas" (305). He agrees with Tom Long's critique of Eugene Lowry's emphasis on concentrating on the rhetorical impact of a text over its content. Taking his cue from Long, Keller argues that while the power of a text "is more than its content, it can't be less" (307).

He concludes that mainline homileticians still do not escape the need for an outline. "'Moves' are still points in an outline that must be thought out and that give structure to the address" (307). He believes that there are "many missteps and mistakes of the narrative preaching movement" (308). What evangelical and mainline preachers can agree on, however, is that sermons must not only engage listeners' minds, but their hearts as well. Both can agree on the importance of movement in the sermon. The sermon should take the congregation somewhere. He agrees with Eugene Lowry that the sermon should create some kind of tension. "A narrative begins when something knocks life off balance" (229).

Keller hits hard the idea of preaching Christ from every text. Every sermon must end with a reference to Christ (184–185): "we must preach Christ from every text, which is the same as saying we must preach the gospel every time and not just settle for general inspiration or moralizing" (48). Keller argues whether you are talking about Joseph and Potiphar's wife or

David and Goliath, “If you don’t *every time* emphatically and clearly fit that text into Christ’s salvation and show how he saved us through resisting temptation, . . . then you are only confirming moralists in their moralism” (61–62). The major problem with this perspective is that Scripture is primarily Theocentric and not Christocentric. God is the author and the source of all things. Prayer and praise and worship are almost exclusively directed to God. Christ is the agent through whom God works. Christ is the “anointed one,” meaning he was selected by God. To insist that all sermons be Christocentric is to miscommunicate a central message of Scripture.

One of the strengths of the book is that Keller takes a holistic approach to preaching, arguing that it is about preparing the preacher more than preparing the sermon (205). Preaching, therefore, is not just about possessing natural talent and learning techniques. Rather, as he puts it, “You may not have strong public-speaking gifts, but if you are godly, your wisdom and love and courage will make you an interesting preacher” (196). Character will “make up for certain shortcomings in gifts” (196). Half the book is dedicated to preparing the heart and character of the preacher. This is a refreshing perspective on the task of preaching. In other words, preaching is a lifestyle. It is not just something we do on Sunday but it is a part of the spiritual formation of the preacher. Keller’s book is a thoughtful reflection on preaching from an evangelical perspective and makes an honest effort to find some common ground between evangelical and mainline homileticians.

Dave Bland, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN