

Phil Snider, ed. *Preaching as Resistance: Voices of Hope, Justice, and Solidarity*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018. 167 pages. \$19.99.

What stance does the church take regarding civic institutions, legal authorities, and national governments that often enrich those who have power, wealth, education, and position to the detriment to “the least of these”? The pulpit through the ages has oscillated between being either complicit or prophetic depending on time, location, and theological commitments. The strange complicity between the state and religion in the birth and passion narratives in Matthew’s Gospel deserves not only theological reflection but also provides an early case study for how Christians navigate institutional and systemic powers. Advocating complicity is not an option. Snider has gathered representative sermons that address current political and ethical themes that require Christian action rather than a passive stance. The sermons collected in *Preaching Resistance* overtly challenge several established political and religious groups that compete for position among the principalities and the powers.

While these sermons vary in hermeneutics, exegesis, homiletics, theology, and social location, they consistently demonstrate an apt word for politically tense situations. Some preachers and traditions choose silence, knowing that congregations reflect the bipartisan nature of the current political landscape. Whether the preacher chooses silence or is silenced by unreceptive constituents, the result is the same. Depending how color-coded your church is (red, blue, or purple), the sermons collected here will be received differently. Blue churches will offer the “Amen!” Red churches will have mixed reactions that range from hostility to placation. Yet most churches live in the reality of “purple.” Purple churches, or at least the churches where I preach, will be sympathetic to the sermons collected here and yet perceive them as too politically charged and therefore explosive. Most readers will probably find at least one “hot potato” topic too intense for their local congregation. What does a preacher in a “purple” church do?

Snider offers these sermons as a small representation of the possibilities. The sermons exemplify being proactive rather than reactive. Reactive sermons will not be able to keep up with the constant barrage of accessible bad news. Yet through an ongoing diet of catechetical preaching that undergirds resistance to the powers, preachers will shape the practical wisdom and communal discernment of the congregation.

Both the Introduction (by Snider) and the Afterword (by Richard W. Voelz) articulate a way of thinking about *Preaching Resistance*. Succinctly, the theology of resistance articulated includes: 1) comparing and contrasting “the world as it is in comparison to how God wants it to be,” 2) inviting “listeners into another space and time wherein the transforming realm of God is experienced and celebrated,” and 3) equipping “listeners to do the truth, or make the truth happen, by responding to the call of justice and love harbored in the name of God” (5). Additionally, resistance preaching requires a nuanced vision of the kingdom of God, a larger community of support, an historic consciousness, a revised sense of pulpit authority, and an open door to participation in a new and “hope-filled way” (165-166).

I noted three patterns in these sermons. First, often a guest speaker whose ethos garnered respect delivered the sermon. Both ethos and hospitality between the speaker and the congregation were evident. Second, few of the sermons had as their direct focus a particular headline and could not be categorized as “protest” or “reactive.” Instead the sermons grounded resistance in larger theological roots. I heard repeatedly the idea, “This is not the kind of people we want to be.” Or, “This is the kind of people we aspire to be.” Third, Will Willimon is often cited as someone who is committed to the lectionary no matter what the headlines read. Sticking

to the lectionary often brings connections that the preacher might not make otherwise. Several of the collected sermons modeled how the lectionary served the purposes of resistance (“When I Kept Silent,” and “Take a Knee” were two overt examples). In this way the lectionary functions as one tool that over time transforms a community prepared not only to resist but also to invite new ways of being community in the public square.

Whether or not you embrace the politics and theological commitments of the preachers, the collection can serve as case studies of hermeneutics in practice and concretizations that promote action. I recommend *Preaching Resistance* for its models of apt words, but also as an encouragement to preachers who need both the reassurance and permission to speak in a way that promotes hope, unity, peace, and solidarity.

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