

**I Wish We Could Fast Forward It:  
Negotiating the Practice of Preaching**

Linn Sæbø Rystad

Research Fellow

MF Norwegian School for Theology, Religion and Society

**Abstract:** *Though recent decades in empirical homiletics have significantly contributed to the understanding of what happens in preaching from the listener's point of view, empirical homiletics needs to do another turn and ask: What do listeners do with preaching? This article introduces children into empirical homiletics as a new group of listeners, and by a thick description of preaching as a practice. Children seldom become full participants in the practice of preaching, mainly because they do not understand what preaching is, they struggle to follow the rules, and they have different ends for the practice than the preachers. One implication for homiletics is that if preaching is considered a practice, it can also be taught. This might help children more easily become participants in the practice of preaching.*

## 1. Introduction

Though several homileticians talk of “the practice of preaching,” few account for what they mean by “practice” or how this practice can be explained and understood. However, there are some exceptions. Homileticians Thomas Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale have argued for practice as the best organizational concept to describe preaching.<sup>1</sup> Although their book is an important work on how preaching can be understood as practice, it is directed at understanding the practice of preachers and how preaching can be taught to ministry students. Danish homiletician Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen also argues for a practice-oriented and dialogical approach to preaching. She claims that such an approach needs to shift from analyzing texts to looking at preaching as situated acts, or practice.<sup>2</sup> I agree that practice is an excellent organizational concept for describing preaching; however, I argue that consideration of the preacher is not enough to understand preaching as a practice. To arrive at a more detailed description of what the practice of preaching is, one also has to include the active listening<sup>3</sup> and interpreting task performed by the listeners.

With this article, I aim to contribute to the empirical vein of homiletics. The field of homiletics has seen a turn toward listener-oriented research.<sup>4</sup> This turn has primarily included adult listeners.<sup>5</sup> In other fields, child-centered research—research on children and with

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). I disagree with some components of how they view practice, which I will return to in the discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 36.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of listening as an activity is informed by M.M. Bakhtin's theories on dialogue. See M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 68-70.

<sup>4</sup> See David Rietveld's overview of phenomenological preaching, in David Rietveld, “A Survey of the Phenomenological Research of Listening to Preaching,” *Homiletic* 38, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>5</sup> With the exception of the research group that I have been a part of in Norway, (“Preaching for Young and Old,” book forthcoming), and another Norwegian study where they have studied confirmands' responses to worship services, including preaching (Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen, *Gudstjenester Med Konfirmanter: En Praktisk-Teologisk Dybdestudie Med Teoretisk Bredde*, vol. 12, Prismet Bok (Oslo: IKO-forl., 2017)).

children—has had a boom in the last 30 years.<sup>6</sup> Within the theological world, the fields of religious education and theology of childhood have led the way. Religious education produces a lot of relevant research on how children learn and reflect on their religiosity.<sup>7</sup> Theology of childhood has made a substantial contribution on the more systematic theological side, arguing for seeing children as believers, not believers to be.<sup>8</sup> In the narrower field of practical theology, Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore have written about children.<sup>9</sup> They both advocate a theology that takes children seriously and that includes children’s perspectives and faith in theological work and congregations. Mercer promotes a feminist approach to a theology of childhood.<sup>10</sup> The contributions of Mercer and Miller-McLemore are a valuable starting point for including children and their experiences as an essential field of study in practical theology.

Nevertheless, within the field of theology most of these books and articles are still adults advocating on behalf of children without actually talking with children. Though the subject of children and preaching is sometimes touched upon or reflected on in these works, there is little research done on this subject within the field of homiletics.<sup>11</sup> There is some more or less research-based work done on the topic of children’s sermons. In the 1980s and 1990s in the United States, there was a debate about whether children’s sermons were a good idea or not.<sup>12</sup> Those who argue in favor of them often use developmental psychological or educational arguments to support why children need adjusted sermons,<sup>13</sup> or make theological arguments that

---

<sup>6</sup> For a good overview of the research history of the field of children and religion, see the introduction in Susan B. Ridgely, *The Study of Children in Religions: A Methods Handbook* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). In psychology of religion, see Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> A few examples are Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen and fakultet Universitetet i Oslo Teologisk, “Religiøs Læring I Sosiale Praksiser: En Etnografisk Studie Av Mediering, Identifisering Og Forhandlingsprosesser I Den Norske Kirkes Trosopplæring” (Det teologiske fakultet, Universitetet i Oslo, 2014); Morten Holmqvist and menighetsfakultet Det Teologiske, “Learning Religion in Confirmation: Mediating the Material Logics of Religion: An Ethnographic Case Study of Religious Learning in Confirmation within the Church of Norway” (Department of Religion and Education, MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2015); Jennifer Beste, “Children Speak: Catholic Second Graders’ Agency and Experiences in the Sacrament of Reconciliation,” *Sociology of Religion* 72, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>8</sup> In Norway one of the nestors of theology of childhood was Dagny Kuhl. Other important figures are Sturla Sagberg, Sturla Stålsett, Odd Kjetil Sæbø (no relation to the author of this article) and Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen. Internationally, Friedrich Schweitzer in Germany and Marcia Bunge and Robert Orsi in the United States have played important roles in the field of theology of childhood/the study of children in religions. See Friedrich Schweitzer, “Religion in Childhood and Adolescence: How Should It Be Studied? A Critical Review of Problems and Challenges in Methodology and Research,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 27, no. 1 (2014); Friedrich Schweitzer, Birgitte Thyssen, and Eberhard Harbsmeier, *Barnets Ret Til Religion* (Frederiksberg: Aros, 2006); Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Joyce Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005); Bonnie J Miller-McLemore, “Children and Religion in the Public Square: Too Dangerous and Too Safe, Too Difficult and Too Silly,” *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 3 (2006); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*.

<sup>11</sup> There are a several books in the genre of “how to preach to children.” It would have been interesting to do research on what such books say about preaching and children, but this has not been the subject of this article. In this overview I have chosen to only include peer-reviewed articles or books.

<sup>12</sup> One of the most striking examples I found is this small discussion piece: Sheldon Tostengard and Michael Rogness, “Children’s Sermons,” *Word & World* 10, no. 1 (1990) (not peer-reviewed).

<sup>13</sup> Ronald H, Cram, “Children and the Language of Preaching,” *Journal for Preachers* 17, no. 3 (1994).

argue the necessity of including all in worship.<sup>14</sup> The few I found who write from a homiletical viewpoint either argue against children's sermons,<sup>15</sup> or say that there is a need for children's sermons but strongly argue that they should remain in "the sermon genre" and not become entertainment.<sup>16</sup> Others refuse to take a side in the discussion, but rather argue that since children's sermons have become normalized and are here to stay the challenge is to develop the best possible practice of doing them.<sup>17</sup> This debate shows that homileticians to a certain degree have been interested in the theme of children and preaching, but that this has not resulted in any substantial research on the topic.

In this article, the empirical material comes from Christian education events (CE events) and worship services aimed at children in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway. The Church of Norway does not have a tradition of children's sermons. There is a tradition of Sunday School, but in the worship services that I have studied there is just one preaching event, and this is meant to be for everyone present: children, youth, adults, and the elderly. Even so, I believe the findings in this article also have value for churches that have children's sermons.<sup>18</sup>

### ***1.1 New Turn in Empirical Homiletics?***

I have interviewed children about their experience with and responses to preaching, thus including the perspective of another group of listeners into the listener-oriented vein of homiletics. The turn to interviewing listeners has provided the field of homiletics with valuable insight on what listeners hear when listening to preaching.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, I believe that there is time to do yet another turn and ask the question: *What do listeners do with preaching events?*

I will explore what listeners do with the preaching events by using Theodore Schatzki's definition of practice as an analytical tool, looking at how the children are able to participate in the shared understanding, rules, and teleoaffective structures of the practice of preaching. In the end, I will discuss the implications of the findings for the field of homiletics.

## **2. Background, Material, and Method**

First, I offer some information about Christian education in the Church of Norway and the two events that are the material of this article. The Plan for Christian Education is a nationwide reform of the Church of Norway's work among children and youth that was set in motion in 2009. It requires every congregation to have a plan for systematic and continuous Christian education for all baptized members between the ages of 0-18.<sup>20</sup> *Tower-agents* is an event for children ages 8-9, where the children are invited to be detectives/agents in the church and explore the church. The event spans a few hours on a Saturday and ends with a worship service on Sunday in which the children participate. This event takes place sometime during

---

<sup>14</sup> Wilbert M. Van Dyk, "Preach the Word! To Children," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32, no. 2 (1997): 432; Anna Carter Florence, "A Prodigal Preaching Story and Bored-to-Death Youth," *Theology Today* 64, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>15</sup> Paul R. Raabe, "Children's Sermons and Luther's Small Catechism," *Concordia Journal* 15, no. 2 (1989).

<sup>16</sup> Van Dyk, "Preach the Word! To Children," 438-43; Robert T. Carlson, Jr., "Sacred Speech and Children: The Relationship of the Children's Sermon and Liturgy," *Journal for Preachers* 23, no. 4 (2000) (not peer-reviewed).

<sup>17</sup> James Nieman, "Three Thuds, Four D's, and a Rubik's Cube of Children's Sermons," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22, no. 4 (1995).

<sup>18</sup> It would also be interesting to look at how children experience preaching in regular worship services. As far as I know there is no recent research done on this.

<sup>19</sup> Marianne Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017); Ronald Allen et al., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> <https://kirken.no/nb-NO/church-of-norway/resources/plan-for-christian-education/>, accessed 09/11/17.

spring. *Wide Awake* is an event for children ages 10-12. The children are invited to a sleepover at the church at which they celebrate the church's new year. This event usually takes place on the first Sunday of Advent, and it spans from Saturday afternoon/evening through the worship service on Sunday. This worship service is the main worship service of the congregation. The invitations to the events go out to all children in the relevant age groups who have been baptized in the Church of Norway. However, it is possible to bring friends that have no connection to any church/religion or are members of other churches or religions.

My material consists of field notes of participatory observation of three Christian education events (CE events)—one *Tower-Agent* and two *Wide Awake* events in three different congregations (St. Nicholas, St. Mary, and St. Emmanuel<sup>21</sup>)—and semi-structured interviews with children who attended the happenings, as well as the adult leaders. Most of the children usually do not attend church on Sundays. However, when asked if they attended church often, the children expressed that they believed they did—because they went every time something special happened, like a wedding, baptism, funeral, or when they were invited to a happening like this. Such an utterance is quite typical of members in a Folk Church.<sup>22</sup> Though the Church of Norway is no longer a state church, the members of the church to a large degree reflect those who live in the area. Many of these members attend church mostly when “something special” happens.<sup>23</sup> As Grace Davie has pointed out, in the Scandinavian Folk Churches it seems like people are “belonging without believing.”<sup>24</sup>

I also have video recordings of the Sunday worship service. These video recordings have been used to view the worship services and as a backup of my field notes. The children were interviewed in groups using a focus group approach.<sup>25</sup> The reason for interviewing the children in groups was a hope that the asymmetry of an adult interviewing a child would decrease with a group of children and one adult.<sup>26</sup> I completed six focus group interviews with three to five

---

<sup>21</sup> All names of congregations and persons are anonymized.

<sup>22</sup> For a good introduction to the Scandinavian Folk Churches, see Kirsten Donskov Felter, Ninna Edgardh, and Tron Fagermoen, “The Scandinavian Ecclesial Context,” in *What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Joel Halldorf, Fredrik Wenell, and Stanley Hauerwas, *Between the State and the Eucharist: Free Church Theology in Conversation with William T. Cavanaugh* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 8; Fredrik Saxegaard and menighetsfakultet Det Teologiske, “Realizing Church: Parish Pastors as Contributors to Leadership in Congregations” (MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2017), 16; Grace Davie, “Belief and Unbelief: Two Sides of a Coin,” *Approaching Religion* 2, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>24</sup> I do believe that there should be a “necessarily” introduced into that sentence—Scandinavians are belonging without necessarily believing. Nonetheless, the phrase captures something of what makes the Scandinavian Folk Churches special (Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18).

<sup>25</sup> Focus groups can be done in various ways depending on discipline. Some have a more stringent method than others. I have used a loose methodology leaning on David Morgan, who defines focus groups as, “A research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (David Morgan, “Focus Groups,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 22 (1996): 130).

<sup>26</sup> See Samantha Punch, “Research with Children: The Same or Different from Research with Adults?” *Childhood* 9, no. 3 (2002): 325; Ridgely, *The Study of Children in Religions: A Methods Handbook*, 7; Priscilla Alderson, “Children’s Rights in Research About Religion and Spirituality,” in *The Study of Children in Religions: A Methods Handbook*, ed. Susan B. Ridgely (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 52-53. The choice was also based on practicalities such as time and recommendations after experiences from the project, “Preaching for Young and Old,” where they found group interviews with children to be more rewarding than individual interviews.

children in each group. Also, I had one semi-structured interview with one girl alone.<sup>27</sup> The adults were mainly interviewed individually using semi-structured interviews. I conducted six interviews with pastors and adult volunteers.<sup>28</sup> The children were interviewed right after the worship service was finished. The children in St. Mary and St. Emmanuel are between 10 and 12 years old, and the children in St. Nicholas are between 7 and 9 years old.<sup>29</sup>

### **2.1 What Counts as Preaching in this Article?**

Going into the fieldwork, I had the presumption that preaching is more than what happens in the worship service on Sunday. My thought was that everything that happens during the CE event would affect how the children listen and create meaning from the preaching event on Sunday. There are several presumptions in this. I presumed that the most important preaching was happening in the worship service, that the children listened to preaching, that they created meaning from what they heard, and that they connected what happened in the CE event on Saturday with what happened in the worship service on Sunday. These presumptions were visible in the questions I asked during the interviews. As shown in the analysis, most of my assumptions were wrong, and I had to revise and reject many of them.

In this article, I employ a broad understanding of preaching. The reason for this is empirical. The preachers' self-understanding is that what they do at these happenings is mainly preaching. In "preaching" they include the activities and all "talking in between." In the interviews with the children, it is sometimes difficult to discern which preaching event they are talking about. The different preaching events seem to blend into one box labeled "preaching." The understanding of what counts as preaching that emerges from the empirical material is fluid. Therefore I had to make some boundaries and select what to categorize as preaching for this article. In the concept of preaching, I have included all instances during the CE events when an adult is speaking to the children about the Bible, the church, or faith, where the goal was that the children should experience these instances as relevant for their lives and faith. This means that there are some parts of the event I have categorized as *not* preaching that my informants would have classified as preaching. It also means that some of what I have categorized as preaching is "talking in between" or is closely connected with an activity, in addition to scheduled preaching events.

As I said, I analyze these preaching events by employing concepts from Theodore Schatzki's practice theory. Before we come to the analysis, I offer a short introduction to the main concepts I use.

### **3. Practice Theory**

There is not one coherent "practice theory." There are different versions and each has a particular focus. Practice theoretician Davide Nicolini claims that practice theoretical approaches have five distinctive traits. First, practice theoretical approaches emphasize that there is productive and reproductive work behind all the durable features of our world. Second, it demands that we rethink the role of agents and individuals. Third, equaling mind and body, it

---

<sup>27</sup> This girl could not be found when it was time for the interviews. However, she was waiting outside when we had finished and insisted on being interviewed. The rest of the children who had attended the CE event had gone home, so I interviewed her alone.

<sup>28</sup> With the exception of one adult interview that was a group of three (for practical reasons).

<sup>29</sup> In the field work, I experienced that though the CE events were aimed at certain age groups, the congregations operated with somewhat flexible boundaries as to who is allowed to attend, so the youngest children interviewed were 7 years old.

puts at the forefront the importance of the body and objects in social matters. Fourth, a practice theoretical approach contributes to shedding new light on epistemology and discourse. Finally, through all the things mentioned above it also reaffirms the centrality of interests and power in everything we do.<sup>30</sup>

### **3.1 What is Practice?**

I have chosen Schatzki as my main theorist because I believe his definition of practice as an analytical tool helps open up the inner workings of practices. Schatzki defines practice as a “set of doings and sayings that is organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules and something I call a ‘teleoaffective structure.’”<sup>31</sup> Nicolini places Schatzki within the vein of practice theory that draws on heritage from Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Theorists in this vein of practice theory focus on intelligibility—that people most of the time do what makes sense for them to do and say. Schatzki underlines that to do what makes sense to you to do is not the same as always acting rationally. Practical intelligibility is determined by orientations toward ends (teleology) and by how things matter (affectivity), and both of these things can divert someone from doing what is rational.<sup>32</sup> However, a practice theoretician will not find this sense in the mind of the practitioner; the sense is always shown in practice.<sup>33</sup>

### **3.2 Clarification of Concepts**

I will use the concepts of understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structures (ends and how things matter) as analytical tools in the analysis. After clarifying concepts, I define the practice of preaching using Schatzki’s terms. To operationalize the concepts, I develop questions based on the concepts that I used in the analysis. These are presented at the end of this section.

#### **3.2.1 Understandings**

By “understandings,” Schatzki does not mean some sort of intuition that other prominent practice theorists seem to use to explain much of human behavior. He argues against both Bourdieu’s concept that actors develop a “sense for the game,” and Giddens’ notion that it is practical consciousness that determines routine acts. Schatzki deems both of these problematic and says that they fail to explain why we do what we do, or why we do anything at all; it just demonstrates that we do it. He aims for a thicker description of practice to explain why we do

---

<sup>30</sup> Davide Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Theodore R. Schatzki, “Practice Mind-Ed Orders,” in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. Karin Knorr Cetina (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>33</sup> This means that the mind is not given priority over the body. Yet this equaling motion does not necessarily stop with the mind and the body; some practice theoreticians believe that non-human objects have agency (Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization: An Introduction*, 162-63). Nicolini places Bruno Latour on one end of the scale, but points out that Latour might protest being labelled a practice theoretician. Latour equalizes human and non-human actors in social practice and gives non-human objects agency. In Latour’s version of practice theory, an object can exert direct impact on human action (Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63-86). Schatzki, though recognizing the importance of materiality, claims that only humans carry out practice. He does not believe that materials exert direct impact on human action; they are not equal. See also Sonia Hazard, “The Material Turn in the Study of Religion,” 4, no. 1 (2013); Theodore R. Schatzki, “Materiality and the Social Life,” *Nature and Culture* 5, no. 2 (2010).

what we do or how we know what to do. He claims that actions are better explained as *knowing how to x*, or which doings or sayings constitute doing *x* in a situation.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2.2 Rules

When Schatzki speaks of rules, he means things practitioners are supposed to observe when they are participating in a specific practice. By looking at rules, it is possible to see what makes sense for practitioners to do because what people do often says something about how they understand the rules of a practice—and which rules they want to avoid following.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.2.3 Teleoaffective structure

The third concept consists of two things: ends (telos) and how things matter (affectivity). Schatzki argues that what makes sense for people to do substantially depends on what matters to them and how things matter to them.<sup>36</sup> There is a normative component to the teleoaffective structure. In a practice, not every end is acceptable or correct. The same goes for the different tasks, beliefs, and emotions of the practice.

### 3.3.3 Preaching as practice in practice theoretical terms

A preaching event is made up of several components. Most homileticians would agree that the following components are part of a preaching event: the preacher reads a biblical text, interprets it, and then proclaims this interpretation to the congregation. The congregation's task is to listen and interpret.<sup>37</sup> In this interaction, God is also an active participant in the preacher's preparations, in the act of preaching, and in the act of listening.<sup>38</sup> Using practice theoretical language, one can say that this is the *knowing how to x* of the practice. The rules differ according to context, but most of the time they involve sitting still and listening attentively and quietly. The

<sup>34</sup> Schatzki, "Practice Mind-Ed Orders," 49-51.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>37</sup> This description of the components of preaching is informed by searching for definitions of preaching in several influential homiletical books. I have supplied this selection from books that have been used in homiletic teaching at MF. This is by no means a complete review of definitions from field of homiletics but is a sample to show that across different ways of approaching preaching many agree what constitute its components. See Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 33; David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 11-13; Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 11-29; Halvor Nordhaug, *-Så Mitt Hus Kan Bli Fullt: En Bok Om Prekenen* (Oslo: Luther, 2000); John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 9-10; Charles L. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 68-70; Jana Childers, *Purposes of Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004); James Henry Harris, *The Word Made Plain: The Power and Promise of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), ix; Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 15-18; Robert Stephen Reid, *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-5; Bo Larsson, *Recept Eller Replik? Om Predikans Teologi Och Praktik* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1998), 10; Carina Sundberg, "Här Är Rymlig Plats: Predikoteologier I En Komplex Verklighet: Theologies of Preaching in a Complex Reality" (2008); Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching*, 68-94; Marianne Gaarden, *Prædikenen Som Det Tredje Rum* (Fredriksberg: Forlaget Anis, 2015), 9; Olav Skjevesland, *Broen over 2000 År: Bidrag Til Prekenlæren*, Teologi I Dag (Oslo: Luther, 1981), 34-62; Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, Predikan (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 13; Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 48.

<sup>38</sup> In this article, God as an actor in the practice is not at the forefront since the children do not address God as an actor in the way they talk about preaching.

teleoaffective structure of the practice of preaching is that the listeners should find meaning and relevance for their own lives and faith in the preaching event.

### 3.4 Analytical Questions

In the analysis, I will explore what kind of understanding, or *knowing how to x*, one needs to have to participate as a listener in the practice of preaching. This can be reformulated into the question: *What do you need to know to carry out the listening and interpreting (x) part of the practice of preaching?*

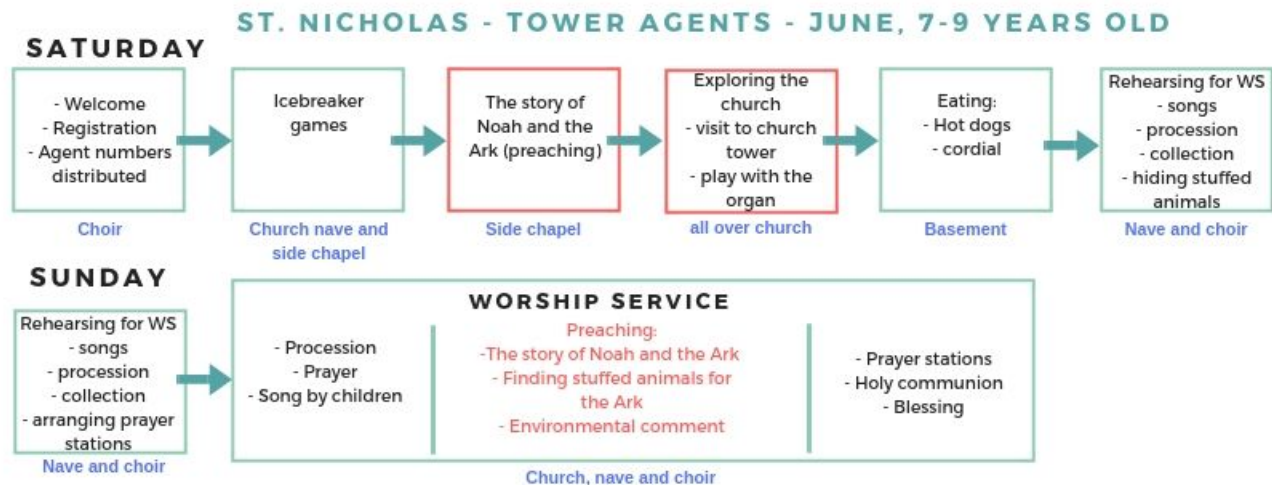
Because the practice of preaching does not have any written rules, I have tried to extract some by looking at my field notes and sayings about preaching from interviews with children and adult leaders. The questions that guided my analysis were: *Which rules does the practice of listening to preaching contain? Which rules are observed (or not) and how are these rules understood?*

Lastly, I looked at which teleoaffective structures children and adults expressed in the interviews, asking: *Which ends do the different participants of the practice have, and are they correct or acceptable according to the understanding of preaching gleaned from the homiletical definitions? What do the listeners do to reach their ends? How do things matter to the listeners?*

## 4. Preaching Events

Below I describe different congregations and central preaching moments. I have made a timeline of the event for each congregation while describing some preaching events in a closer manner. The preaching events described are those I perceived to be the central or primary preaching events of the CE event. Preaching events are marked with red boxes or letters.

### 4.1 Flannelgraph and the Noah story in the St. Nicholas Congregation



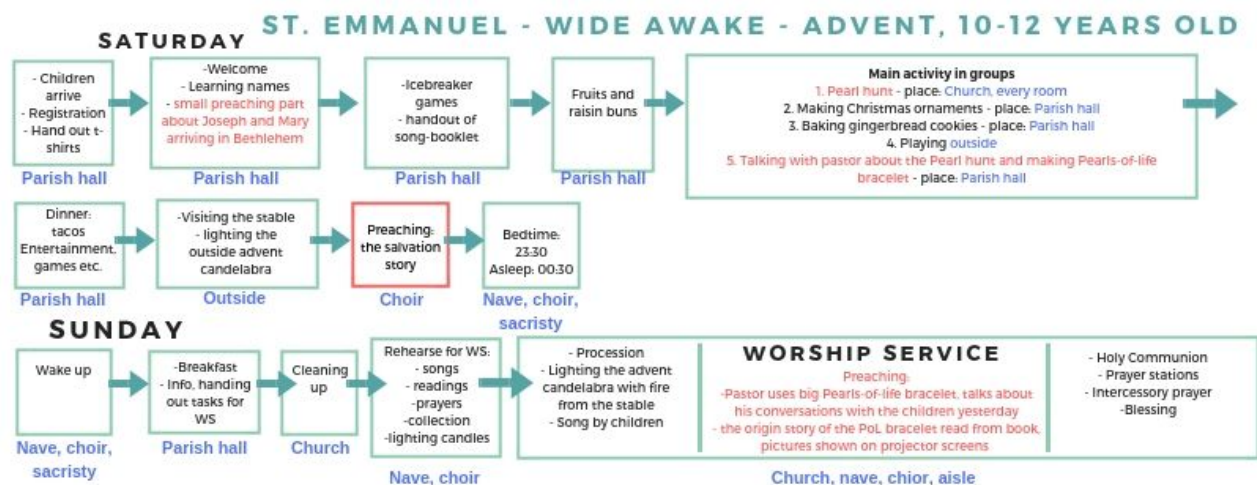
At St. Nicholas the main preaching event on Saturday starts with the catechist, Nicole, stating that she is going to tell the children the story of Noah's Ark. Nicole uses the flannelgraph while she is telling the story. She asks the children which animals Noah needed to bring into the ark. Nicole says that they are allowed to come up to the flannelgraph one at the time to find an animal and put it onto the flannelgraph. Soon everyone is inside the ark, and Nicole removes all the trees and all the land from the flannelgraph. She continues her story but is interrupted by one



of the children who say, “But all the other humans died.” This statement sparks a conversation about evil that revolves around the question of whether it is okay to kill people who are evil or if they instead should be taught to be good.

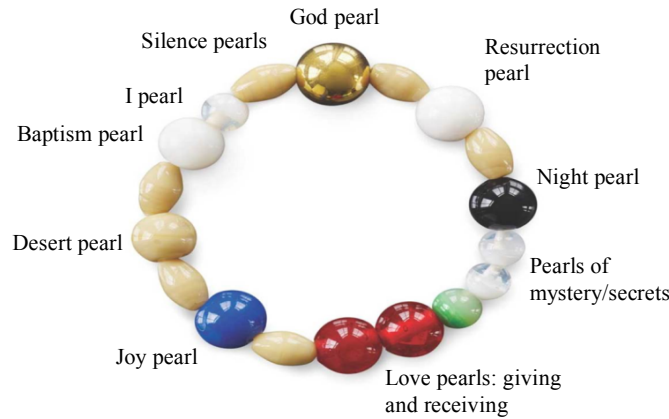
In the worship service on Sunday morning, Nicole tells the same story during the preaching event. This time, however, it is without the interjections and questions of the children. The children are activated once during the preaching event when they roam around the church trying to find all the stuffed animals they have hidden in the room the day before. The stuffed animals represent the animals in the ark. At more than one point during the preaching event children sat with their hands raised, trying to ask questions or answer rhetorical questions posed by Nicole. They were ignored.

#### 4.2 Pearls-of-Life Bracelets in the St. Emmanuel Congregation



At St. Emmanuel, the children were divided into groups of approximately five or six in each group. One group at the time was sent into the church. The church was filled with different stations, one for each pearl in *the Pearls of Life bracelet* (from now on *PoL bracelet*).<sup>39</sup>

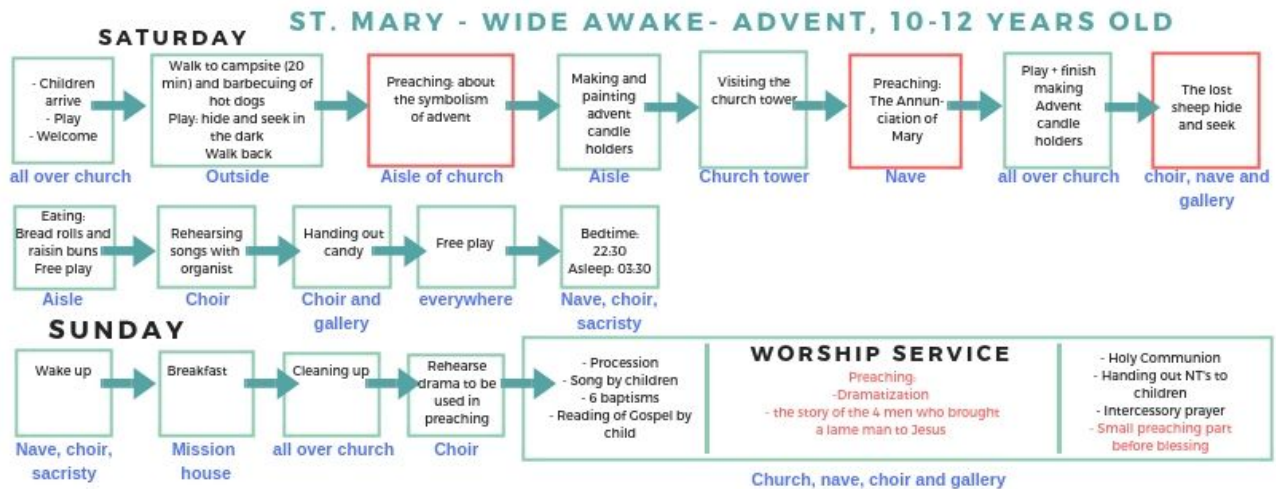
<sup>39</sup> The Pearls of Life bracelet (*Kristuskranen*) is a bracelet that functions as a kind of rosary. It emerges from an idea by the Swedish bishop Martin Lønnebo. There is an app available for iOS that explains the bracelet in English <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/fralsarkransen/id441215781?mt=8#>, accessed 08/11/17.



At each station there is a pearl, some information about that pearl, a verse from the Bible or a poem, and often something the children can do. At the end of each station, they receive the pearl from that station. The children stay quiet except for when they ask questions about the pearls. At the post of the baptism pearl, they ask several questions such as, “What about those who are not baptized? Do they get a baptism pearl?” “Does God care about those who are not baptized?” “Can someone who’s not baptized be here at this event?” The leader, Eva, answers some of their questions, but not all of them. Sometimes she says that she does not know, or that they are asking good and important questions; other times she asks them back, “What do you think?” After the group finishes at the church, they walk over to the parish hall. They now have all the pearls to make a bracelet. In one of the rooms, the pastor, Eric, waits. He has the rubber band needed to complete the bracelet, and a prototype so that the pearls are put on in the correct order. While they finish making the bracelets, Eric asks the children about the experience they have had in the church. He talks with them about which pearl they liked the most, or remembered the best, and why they liked or remembered that pearl.

In the worship service on Sunday morning, Eric opens the preaching event by showing a large version of the PoL bracelet to the congregation and telling them about what the children have been doing the day before. When he describes how he talked with the children about which pearl they remembered, he quotes himself saying, “Which pearl did you remember and why?” The hands of the children sitting in the pews shoot into the air. Eric looks a bit startled but turns to the children and lets them answer the question. He repeats this a couple of times. Then the preaching event continues with the reading of a children’s book that tells the origin story of the PoL bracelet. Eva reads the story while pictures from the book are projected onto the wall of the church.

### 4.3 Advent Candelabras and the Story of when Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man in the St. Mary Congregation



At St. Mary, one activity on Saturday evening was to make Advent candelabras. The pastor, Mark, gathered all the children attending around some tables placed in the aisle of the church. He opens by talking about the color purple and asks the children if they know which colors one needs to mix to get purple. They say, “Blue and red.” Mark replies, “Yes, blue and red. Do you know what those colors symbolize?” Several children say that blue is a symbol of heaven, and he replies that they are correct. Then he asks, “What is red then?” Some say blood. One of the boys says, “Satan.” Mark answers him in a light and amused tone, “No, Jesus came so that we did not have to worry about that guy.” Then he answers his own question: “Blue and red, heaven and earth that meet when Jesus comes to us.” After this preaching event they are allowed to start painting. They have blue, yellow, green, black, grey, and glitter paint. However, no red paint. Mark does not seem stressed by this and tells the children to start painting. Then he disappears to try to find some red paint. He is unsuccessful. This results in some green and blue, but a lot of greyish or brownish advent candelabras. The candelabras are set out to dry and not mentioned again until the end of church coffee when the church educator, Marlon, has to remind the children to take them with them before they leave.<sup>40</sup>

The Sunday worship service has a different theme. The text Mark uses in the preaching event is the story about the four men who carried a paralyzed man to Jesus and lowered him through the roof.<sup>41</sup> Some of the boys who attended the event dramatize the story. Mark then goes on to talk about friendship, sin, and Christmas for about 10 minutes.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Understanding: knowing how to x

*Knowing how to x* in the practice of preaching involves a series of tasks. The preacher reads a biblical text, interprets it, and then proclaims this interpretation to the congregation. The

<sup>40</sup> In the interview with the adults, the pastor (and preacher) says that they plan on sending out a text message with some information about Advent and a suggestion for a psalm to sing.

<sup>41</sup> Mark 2:1-11 or Luke 5:17-26.

congregation's task in the practice is to listen and interpret. Several of the children show that they do not necessarily *know how to x* in their part (listening and interpreting) of the practice of preaching. In general, it seems like the children manage the first task but struggle with the second. When I asked questions about what they remembered from the worship service in general or the preaching events in particular, they often could answer. When I tried to prod deeper and asked for the relevance and significance of the preaching event for them, many struggled.

**Interviewer:** I was wondering, is anything that Mark has said, today or yesterday... that you think, like, you recognize it from your own lives? Is anything of what he says important to you?

**Michael:** Is this a sort of a camp?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Michael:** I have been to camp several times.

**Interviewer:** Okay, mmm...

**Michael:** At NN.

**Interviewer:** But I was wondering, does it happen when Mark talks to you about God and Jesus that you go, "Oh, this was interesting?"

**Michael:** We used to have like these Bible gatherings at camp.

**Interviewer:** Okay, are they different from these?

**Michael:** What?

**Interviewer:** Are they different from the ones here, or are they similar?

**Michael:** Not so very different.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so what do you think of such gatherings then?

**Michael:** (quietly)... I don't know what to say...<sup>42</sup>

Michael had been part of another similar practice and tried to use the understanding of that practice to understand the one he was participating in now. Schatzki argues that sometimes practices might overlap and that this could affect what makes sense for people to do in a situation. Another practice can break into the practice you are currently doing and change how that practice is organized, and thus what makes sense for you to do.<sup>43</sup> Michael says that what he calls the "Bible gatherings" at camp and the preaching events that he has experienced at church are "not that different," but he does not know how he feels about them. He is negotiating between the two different practices, the practice of preaching in the event that he has just attended, and the "Bible gatherings" he previously attended at camp. When I try to turn the interview back to my line of questioning and the relevance of preaching for him, Michael continues to talk about the "Bible gatherings" at camp. When I continue to search for an interpretation process, he is not able to answer me. Some would argue that this is because Michael is too young to verbalize such abstract and difficult interpretation processes. Such an argument is problematic. If this is the case, and yet the end of the preaching event is to have the listeners interpret the preaching event in a way that is relevant to their lives, one is basically arguing that children are too young to listen to preaching. In addition to this, theologian Tobias

---

<sup>42</sup> The theoretical framework of practice theory was not part of my original theoretical framework before the interviews. Had I held the interviews again I would have tried to focus more on what the children did with the preaching events, and asked for that.

<sup>43</sup> Schatzki, "Practice Mind-Ed Orders," 53.

Faix argues that youth do have the ability to express their faith and beliefs. They just do it with other words than adult researchers would use.<sup>44</sup> What is more, some of the other children did *know how to x*.

Already it is easy to see how I operated with a different understanding of the practice of preaching than many of the children did. Even though it was not my intention, I was under the impression that Michael and I had the same understanding of what doing *x* was as a listener in the practice of preaching. I continuously searched for Michael's interpretative process, believing that *x* in this situation was to listen and interpret. Michael, however, was trying to figure out what this thing, preaching, was by comparing it to something he already knew.

Another example from St. Nicholas shows a different version of negotiation. Nina, Neil, and Nigel can retell the words of the preacher. In the sense of transference of knowledge as parroting what has been said, they had learned a lot.<sup>45</sup> However, when I ask for their interpretative process, they struggled.

**Interviewer:** If you were to tell me what Nicole talked about when she talked alone, what did she say?

**Nina:** She talked about those people, with Noah and all that...

**Neil:** She talked about how God wanted to destroy the world.

**Nina:** And she had only found two girls, but then she found the rest.

**Interviewer:** She found some more today, yes. And she said something about God destroying the world?

**Nina:** Yes, there was something she did not say today. The thing about that they had to bring 14 sheep because they had to slaughter some.

**Interviewer:** Yes, right... What did you think about while she talked about Noah and the animals?

**Nina:** I don't know.

**Interviewer:** Nothing? What did you think of?

**Nina:** No...

**Interviewer:** Nothing? Did you pay attention?

**Nina:** YES! I tried to like...

**Interviewer:** Was there a point where you thought that what she talked about was something that could have been about you and your lives? (silence)

Was that a weird question?

**Nigel:** Hmm?

**Interviewer:** It looked like it was an odd question (laughing). You have a very skeptical look.

As with Michael, my line of questioning presupposes that Nina, Neil, and Nigel have the same understanding of preaching as I do. Like Michael, Nina manages the first task of the twofold task of the listener in the practice of preaching. She has listened or tried to listen. Yet she

---

<sup>44</sup> T. Faix, "Semantics of Faith: Methodology and Results Regarding Young People's Ability to Speak about their Beliefs," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 27, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>45</sup> Gaarden, *Prædikenen Som Det Tredje Rum*, 21; Morten Holmqvist and Geir Afdal, "Modes of Learning and the Making of Religion: The Norwegian and Finnish Curricula for Confirmation," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 28 (2015), 4.

does not know what to do with the things she has heard. I will return to this interview because I changed my line of questioning and then got very different answers from Nina.

Nigel, on the other hand, thinks the question is weird. He does not voice the same struggle as Nina; his reaction is mostly conveyed through body language. In his response, it is also evident that our understanding of what is going on in the practice of preaching is not the same. When asked whether the preaching event had anything to do with his life he says “Hmm?” followed by a grimace that I interpreted as meaning that my question to him was odd. During the rest of the interview, Nigel states that what he liked the most about the worship service in general was to walk in the procession at the start and to carry the Bible while doing so. When asked about how he liked the story of Noah and the ark, he replies that it was fun and exciting, holding two thumbs in the air. Nigel has no answer as to why it was exciting. He is also unequivocal in his opinion that the preaching event would have been even more boring if Nicole had not used the flannelgraph. In other words, Nigel also exhibits that he understands part of the practice of preaching. He has listened and he likes the biblical story. Just as with Michael and Nina, it is the interpretative task of the practice that is unknown.

Some of the children did *know how to x*. When asked about what she thought about during the preaching event on Sunday morning, Emily from the St. Emmanuel congregation answers:

**Emily:** Well, I thought about that blue pearl, the happiness one.

**Interviewer:** The blue?

**Emily:** Because I don't like to think about sad things and things like that.

**Interviewer:** Why did you... what did you think about when you thought about that blue pearl? Did you have something to be happy about?

**Emily:** ...Well, there has been some stuff going on in my family, stuff that I have not liked.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, oh, ok...

**Emily:** But now it seems like it's going to turn out to be fine... and then I am happy, yes.

Here we can see Emily both listening and interpreting. She listens to Eric and Eva and then uses the blue pearl to think about the stuff that has been going on in her family. Emily is interpreting what she hears in the preaching event and applying it to her own life, making the preaching event relevant to her. In other words, she *knows how to x*. Emily was not the only child in St. Emmanuel who did this. Several say that during the preaching event they thought of their bracelet and then something to do with their lives, and in the video you see at least one boy looking intently at his bracelet while Eric talks. This stands out from the two other congregations.

## 5.2 Rules

We have already established that the practice of preaching is an interpretative practice and that it is supposed to further relevance or meaning for the listener. However, to get to that end, there are rules to follow. The children I have interviewed clearly understood that there were some rules connected to the practice of preaching. They can be formulated like this:

- When listening to preaching, you need to sit still in the pew and (look like you) listen.
- When listening to preaching, you should not talk with others in the pew.

- In the worship service, you should let the preacher talk uninterrupted. Those preaching events are not usually a place for questions.
- If the preaching event takes place outside the worship service, other rules apply.
- When listening to preaching, you should not fall asleep.

Michael from St. Mary is of special interest with regards to rules.

**Interviewer:** What are you thinking of? During the preaching events?

**Michael:** Oh, I am looking forward to it being finished...

**Interviewer:** (laughing) That's what you're doing... Are you happy or sad when the pastor speaks?

**Michael:** I am happy that I found Snorlax, Pikachu, and Onix!

**Interviewer:** Did you do that during the preaching event?

**Michael:** (satisfied) Hmmm...

The concept of rule following in practice theory is mostly taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein. Rule following can sound like something out of a rationalist paradigm, though following the Wittgensteinian tradition it is not. Wittgenstein argued against the notion of rules as some structure that is predetermined and waits for us outside of ourselves. According to him, there is nothing preexisting structure “out there” to guide us. He also claimed that when we follow a rule, we follow it blindly. By this, he meant that although there may be some interpretation process in motion when we follow a rule, in the end we just act. This does not mean that we always follow the rule correctly (according to the shared understanding of the practice). What it means to follow a rule correctly (the normative aspect) is decided by consensus among different rule followers. All this sounds straightforward, but there is a problem. Is there any distinction between genuinely following a rule and just happening to behave like you follow the rule? David Bloor, interpreting Wittgenstein, claims that there is. He suggests that what Wittgenstein meant by rule following was the genuine following of rules—that you follow the rule because you know it is a rule and you are aware of what you do.<sup>46</sup>

Michael expresses a deep wish for all the preaching events he participates in to finish quickly. Nevertheless, he obeys the rules—he sits still and looks like he listens. However, Michael is not really listening; he spends the preaching event playing Pokémon Go,<sup>47</sup> which is obeying the rules but not obeying them at the same time, or not genuinely following the rule. This can be explained as another manifestation of the lack of shared understanding Michael brings to the practice of preaching.

One of the interviews in St. Nicholas portrays a different version of rule following: not following the rule of listening to the preaching at all:

**Interviewer:** When Nicole was talking, was there ever a time where you thought “Oh, I can think about the same sometimes.” Or, “I can relate to that?”

**Nora:** No...

(they talk over each other, and there are a lot of noise)

**Interviewer:** Why could you not relate? Was it because it was about something that

---

<sup>46</sup> David Bloor, “Wittgenstein and the Priority of Practice,” in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. K. Knorr-Cetina, Theodore R. Schatzki, and Eike von Savigny (London: Routledge, 2001), 96-97.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.pokemongo.com/en-us/>, accessed December 20, 2018.

happened so long ago?

**Nathanael:** It was because I could not be bothered to listen.

**Interviewer:** Why not?

**Nathanael:** Because... blah, blah, blah, blah.

**Interviewer:** It was boring?

**Nathanael:** YES!

**Nora:** I wish we could fast forward it...

**Interviewer:** Was it THAT boring?

**Nathanael:** Yes!! I will never go to church again...

Nathanael seems to be in direct opposition to the rules. He could not be bothered to listen at all. However, when I conferred with my field notes, all the children sat still in the pew and did not talk to each other for most of the preaching event. Nathanael did follow the rules, but at the same time not. Although it seemed like he was listening, he was in fact not listening but being bored. Elsewhere in the interviews, Nathanael sticks to his story of the preaching event being “blah, blah, blah.” Nathanael is not the only one from the interviews who deems sitting still and listening quietly to the preaching event as boring or “blah, blah, blah.” Even though the examples are two boys, this is not a gendered issue. At St. Nicholas, Nora and Nadine feel the same way, and at St. Mary, Megan also says that she never listens to what the preacher is saying. Both at St. Emmanuel and St. Mary, the children also express that following the rules of sitting still in the pews, being quiet, and listening to what the different adults say is difficult and boring. This is one of the strongest patterns in the material across all four congregations.

In the sense of genuinely following the rules, the children seldom do so except the rule of being quiet. They do not protest against the rule of being quiet. Maybe this is because they are used to being told to be quiet when adults are speaking, or because the space of the church invites quietness. The rules that are difficult to follow, both genuinely and not, are to sit still and to listen. These rules the children have different ways of circumventing while still appearing to follow the rules.

### 5.3 Ends

The church staff has explicit and implicit ends they hope the children will achieve. However, within the church staff there are multiple and sometimes competing ends. From the interviews with the church staff and adult volunteers, I have formulated these ends:

<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Preaching</b>
To teach the children about being a Christian	To have all the activities of the event underline what they say when they preach
To develop faith	To help the children reflect on their lives, faith, place in the world, and relationship with God
To pass on the love of biblical stories	That what they (the preachers) say and do should have an impact on the children and hopefully make a difference in their lives
	To link the biblical texts and the world today, make it relevant
	To point to Jesus



If we compare the ends of the adults with the end of the synthesized definition of preaching I established earlier, we see that they are close to each other. I presented the end of the synthesized definitions of preaching to be “that the listeners are to use the preacher’s words as a way of interpreting their own life, faith, and the society around them.” The adults seem to share the understanding and goals of the practice of preaching. They have usually had one or more meetings before the CE events to discuss what to do during them and to “get everyone on the same page.” All this means that most of the time the leaders have developed an additional understanding of what the CE events mean and what they should mean for the children. They have agreed on the ends. Still, the ends are not entirely in unison. The ends of teaching children about being Christian, passing on the love of biblical stories, and developing faith have a somewhat different tone than the rest. These ends aim at a more didactic understanding. Some of the pastors were occupied with what they perceived as a lessening of Christian education in Norwegian schools and wanted very much to remedy this through these CE events. The adults thus have two main ends that compete with each other during the preaching events.

The children’s ends spread out more than the adults. Some children do share the end of learning more about being a Christian, and some want to learn something new. Nevertheless, most of the ends are different from those of the adults:

<b>Learning (teaching)</b>	<b>Reflecting (preaching)</b>	<b>Escaping</b>
To learn more about being a Christian	To stop thinking about “bad thoughts/feelings”	That the preaching event should be as short as possible (it is always too long)
To learn something new		To get away with doing something else other than listening
To show their parents what they have learned, made and done the day before		

The ends I have labeled “escaping” are not “correct” or “acceptable” according to the shared understanding of the practice. However, this is the most common end—the notion that preaching is boring and long strongly pops up in the ends of the children. There are far more children talking about wanting the preaching event to be as short as possible than children who are stating that they want to learn about being a Christian.

One of the ends I find most instructive is the one stating that the goal of the preaching event is to show their parents what they have learned, made, and done the day before:

**Interviewer:** But, ehh... when the pastor preached, or when Kevin and Katrine preached...

**Emily:** Mmmm...

**Interviewer:** What was it about?

**Erica:** Was it not about the bracelet?

**Interviewer:** Mmm...

**Erica:** About what the different pearls were.

**Interviewer:** How did you like it? To sit and listen to that?

**Emily:** Well, it was like, we went through all that yesterday... so it was a bit like we were showing the others that were not there yesterday what we had learned.

**Interviewer:** So you thought the preaching was not to you, but to the others, those who were not present yesterday?

**Emily:** Yes.

Even though Emily did *know how to x*—listening to the preaching and connecting it to reflections of her own life—this was not her end. One could argue that though Emily does the practice accurately, she still does not entirely share the understanding and teleoaffective structure of the practice.

In order to reach the end of making time pass more quickly or at least in a less boring way, the children deploy different strategies. Michael from St. Mary plays Pokémon Go. Max, also from St. Mary, suggests that his time could have been spent in a better way, like playing hide-and-seek. Most common is simply to not listen. At St. Emmanuel, where none of the children say that the preaching event is boring, and where several of them state that their ends are to learn and to learn more about being a Christian, they use the bracelet as a means of making sense of the preaching event. This leads us to affectivity: how things matter.

#### 5.4 Affectivity

Part of the teleoaffective structure is also how things matter. What is it that makes things matter to us?

##### a) Materiality

The preachers are not naïve; they know that the children do not always pay attention to what they say. They try to remedy this by being funnier, including drama, including materiality in different ways (like the flannelgraph, bracelets, Advent candelabras), or asking questions. This sometimes “works”; nevertheless, the children mostly find preaching boring. At St. Emmanuel, the PoL bracelet is used by the children to listen and interpret the different preaching events. The children are in no small degree helped to take part in the shared understanding of what the PoL bracelet means and how it can be used. This is done by first introducing the children to each pearl, then talking with them about which pearl they remembered best and why, and by using the bracelet actively in the worship service. The children are told that the pearls have names and functions, like the pearl of joy, but they are not told what kind of joy to associate with the pearl. There is an open room where the children can go in and appropriate the different pearls and fill them with their own intentions.

Homileticians Lorensen, Gaarden, Campbell, and Cilliers have pointed to the theories of M.M. Bakhtin as fruitful for homiletics.<sup>48</sup> Bakhtin argues that when we speak we face two choices: to speak monologically or dialogically. This choice between a monological or dialogical approach is ever present, not just in everyday conversations but also in various forms of complex language genres where the dialogue is indirect, like in preaching events.<sup>49</sup> Bakhtin claims that words always belong to someone; they are never neutral. We have to appropriate the other’s words and make them our own; to do this, we need to populate the words with our own

---

<sup>48</sup> Charles L. Campbell and Johan H. Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012); Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*; Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching*.

<sup>49</sup> Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching*.

intention.<sup>50</sup> I claim that this theory also can be used as a means of describing how materiality matters in preaching events. At St. Emmanuel, the PoL bracelet is used dialogically; in this way, the bracelet becomes an introduction to the listeners' task in the practice of preaching.

In St. Nicholas, both the flannelgraph and searching for the stuffed animals makes the preaching event in the worship service more bearable. The children say that listening to preaching events without the flannelgraph is much more boring. However, the use of the flannelgraph and searching for the stuffed animals do not have the same effect on the children at St. Nicholas as the PoL bracelet has at St. Emmanuel. The children do not mention the dramatization or the making of Advent candelabras at St. Mary. They do mention many of the other activities. They talk about being outside (the first activity), playing sheep and shepherd hide-and-seek (an activity mentioned as "special"), being allowed to see and touch the church bells (an activity mentioned as "very fun"). In St. Mary and St. Nicholas, to a much larger degree the children are left without any open space for their appropriation. The materiality is used as a distraction, entertainment, or to prop up the words of the preacher.<sup>51</sup> Therefore the materiality remains unused by the children, and the potential that the different materiality has to help the children become part of the shared understanding of the practice of preaching also remains unused.

#### **b) Affective spaces**

One of the most striking things in the interviews is how many of the children say they think about death, severe illness, and family issues when they listen to preaching, even though I never perceived these themes to be the main subject in the preaching events. My hunch is that these themes and emotions are activated by being in church. Andrew Reckwitz argues that social theory has lost sight of space when discussing social matters. He argues for including what he names affective spaces. He states that "Affections can, of course, occur between subjects and single objects... But they can also emerge and are in fact much more likely to emerge within comprehensive three-dimensional settings comprising extensive arrangements of artifacts within which human bodies move."<sup>52</sup> Reckwitz argues that spaces need to be appropriated by those using them to form affects. The appropriation always brings forth the user's past experiences and different implicit social and cultural backgrounds.<sup>53</sup>

We return to Nina. When I ask how she felt during the preaching, her answers change:

**Interviewer:** Did you feel anything? Were you sad, happy, or bored or something?

**Nina:** I thought some thoughts that I don't like.

**Interviewer:** Oh, would you like to tell me what kind of thoughts they were?

**Nina:** Okay! That on the third of April Mom died.

**Interviewer:** Did she? Mm...

**Nina:** It was in 2007, so it was not...

---

<sup>50</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael Holquist, and Caryl Emerson, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, vol. 1, Voprosy Literaturny I Estetiki (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293-94.

<sup>51</sup> Bakhtin uses the concepts of architecture and scaffolding to explain this. I examine this more fully in a forthcoming anthology chapter, "Preaching at the Threshold," where I discuss how materiality, Bible texts, and dramatizations are used in two preaching events employing Bakhtin's concepts of scaffolding and architecture, and of dialogical or monological.

<sup>52</sup> Andreas Reckwitz, "Affective Spaces: A Praxeological Outlook," *The Journal of Theory and Practice* 16, no. 2 (2012): 253.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

**Interviewer:** So that was what you were thinking about? Mmm... And how does that make you feel, thinking about that?

**Nina:** A bit sad.

**Interviewer:** Yes... and Mom, is that your grandmother or...?

**Nina:** No, my great-grandmother. She died at the hospital.

**Interviewer:** Did you go to the church afterward?

**Nina:** Yes, not this one, but the other one.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Nina:** But you know that woman who...

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Nina:** She was the one who talked at Mom's funeral.

The woman Nina is talking about is the pastor in St. Nicholas, Natalie. Natalie was present but did not preach at all during the CE event or in the worship service. It seems like it is enough for Nina to meet Natalie and see her in the church to start thinking about her great-grandmother's funeral. The fact that she has met the pastor before affects how preaching matters to Nina. This could have been classified under the pastor's ethos.<sup>54</sup> However, I believe that for Nina, it is not the ethos of Natalie that is important. Natalie is more like an artifact in the affective space of church. To Nina, it does not matter that she is now in a different church than the one the funeral was in; it matters that what she sees and experiences classifies under the affective space of church.

At St. Mary, I overheard some children talking about the creation of God:

**Interviewer:** So yesterday I heard you talking about who it was that created God. I think you were there? Weren't you?

**Michael:** Yes (laughs)... well, it's like this: the one who created God is air. Or God created air and air created God.

**Interviewer:** Ah... is this something you often talk about?

**Michael and Max:** No, no, no!!

**Interviewer:** Or do you just talk about it when you're at church?

**Michael:** This was the first time!

**Interviewer:** Was it the first time? But do you talk more about such things when you're at church than when you are at other places?

**Both:** Yes!

**Interviewer:** Does this happen when it is just you children talking to each other and not when the pastor is talking?

**Michael:** Yes...

Being in church also makes children talk to each other about different topics than they usually do. These two boys do not often talk to each other about how God came into being. However, being at church provides a space where they can discuss such subjects. When the

---

<sup>54</sup> I agree with the many homiletical contributions who highlight the role of the preacher's ethos. However, in this particular case I believe that it was not Natalie's ethos but rather the affective space of church that affected Nina's preaching event.

children appropriate the affective space of the church, their affects seem to orient towards existential issues. These sometimes seem to speak louder than the preacher.

## 6. Discussion

In the introduction I argued that homiletics needs to do another turn, not just asking how listeners listen to preaching but what they do with preaching. Through analyzing interviews with children by using a practice theoretical approach, we have seen that these children do many different things with preaching. They listen, or not. They struggle to interpret preaching. They play Pokémon Go. They think about existential questions. In the discussion, I want to address what these findings imply for homiletics. There may also be implications for how preachers might revise their preaching practice; however this article does not have a prescriptive aim, and as such this will not be salient in the discussion.

### 6.1. Homiletical Definitions Take Too Much Listener Interaction for Granted

The most salient discovery in the analysis is that children are not a part of the understanding of the practice, and do not know what to do with preaching. This is particularly visible in the lack of a process to hand down what *knowing how to x* is for the practice of preaching. Most of the time, it is simply presupposed that everyone who listens to preaching knows what to do with it. In this regard, my empirical findings contradict the work of Theo Pleizier, who claims that something religious always happens in the act of listening to preaching.<sup>55</sup> Theologically, I do not disagree with him. However, for the majority of the children their ends point to preaching functioning as learning or escape. And, as I have argued before, the children are capable of expressing religious experiences and feelings.<sup>56</sup> They also do this during the interviews. There are several instances where the children talk about something they have done during these CE events as “special” or “very interesting,” or when they show that they are clearly moved by something but cannot put it into words. However, these experiences and instances are seldom related to the preaching event.

The turn to listeners has already started a discussion where the pastor is not taken for granted as the main actor in preaching and it is no longer taken for granted that what the pastor says is what is heard by the listeners.<sup>57</sup> However, the analysis of the children’s responses through a practice theoretical lens shows that we cannot even take for granted that listeners listen or know how to listen. We also cannot take for granted that they know the rules of the practice of preaching, or that they have the same ends as preachers for preaching.

Through this analysis, I have shown that children and adults have diverging ends for the practice of preaching. In other words, preachers cannot take for granted that they have the same ends as the listeners (for those who preach every Sunday, this might be stating the obvious). The children’s main end is to make the preaching event pass as quickly as possible, while the adults want the preaching events to help the children reflect on their lives and faith, and they want to teach the children the basics of Christianity.

---

<sup>55</sup> Theo Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics* (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Faix, “Semantics of Faith: Methodology and Results Regarding Young People’s Ability to Speak about their Beliefs.”

<sup>57</sup> See Hans Austnaberg, *Improving Preaching by Listening to Listeners: Sunday Service Preaching in the Malagasy Lutheran Church* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012); Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*; Allen, et. al., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies*; Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*.

The difference in ends highlights something that I claim to be a central problem with preaching to children. The fusion of preaching and teaching, of wanting the preaching events to be both informative and transformative, is confusing. The children, therefore, seem to revert into a practice they know, teaching. Preaching thus becomes mainly information that they can learn from, and not something that is relevant to them and can affect their lives.<sup>58</sup> I believe that the competing ends make it more difficult for children to participate in the practice of preaching. It is simply difficult to understand which practice they are asked to participate in. Several children then choose to regard preaching as similar to a practice they already know, teaching, and relate to preaching like it is teaching. Others, like Michael, struggle to negotiate how preaching is related to the practice of “Bible gatherings” that he already knows. Either way, most of the children end up not participating in the practice the adult preacher wants them to participate in.

### **6.2 If Preaching is a Practice, it can be Taught**

Many practical theologians subscribe to the notion of practice as *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.<sup>59</sup> This notion is especially in practical theological literature from the United States.<sup>60</sup> In this vein, practical wisdom is imparted through learning from experienced practitioners over time. Additionally, practical theological definitions of practice often presuppose that those who take part in a practice do it with a specific motivation and direction. Christian practices are seen to be done “in response to and in the light of God as known in Jesus Christ.”<sup>61</sup> Most of the children I have interviewed do not participate in the practice as a deliberate response to God. Mostly, they do what they do because they are told to do it. That does not mean that they do not enjoy it or cannot have religious experiences when doing it, but it does mean that, at least in the Norwegian context, the motivation underlying practical theological definitions of practice cannot be presupposed.<sup>62</sup>

In the analysis, I have shown that most children do listen, but do not know how to interpret what they are hearing or understand that this is what they are supposed to do. A few children show that they do *know how to x*, mainly at St. Emmanuel. It does not seem like merely doing the practice is enough for the children to participate in the practice. Although they have several experienced practitioners they can learn from, the learning does not occur. Interestingly, the children do seem to have a certain grasp of the rules they perceive to be in place for the practice of preaching. However, in the interviews they reveal that they are not always genuinely following the rules. Maybe the outward following of rules can be attributed to the children watching experienced practitioners and following suit. Yet it is difficult to see someone’s interpretation process. In other words, for the children to learn how to genuinely follow the rules,

---

<sup>58</sup> The terms “information” and “transformation” are inspired by Bruno Latour, “‘Thou Shall Not Freeze-Frame,’ or How Not to Misunderstand the Science and Religion Debate,” in *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience*, ed. James D. Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). By saying this, I do not claim that preaching should never contain information (or *logos* as it is often named in the homiletical literature), or that teaching is just information and never transformation.

<sup>59</sup> See Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>60</sup> Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed and interesting discussion of the differences between a Lutheran and an U.S. approach to practice within theology (focusing especially on Dykstra, Bass, and Dean) see Bård Eirik Hallesby Norheim, *Practicing Baptism: Christian Practices and the Presence of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

it is not enough for them to observe expert practitioners. As David Bloor argues, to genuinely follow a rule you need to know that you are following a rule.<sup>63</sup> The rules of the practice of preaching are not explicit but implicit. By not taking the rules of the practice of preaching for granted but making them more explicit, it might make it easier to understand why these are part of this practice and why they should be followed.

The CE events that the children attended are discrete events that occur once a year.<sup>64</sup> Both the notion of practice as *phronesis* and other practice theories argue that mastering a practice or becoming a practitioner takes time.<sup>65</sup> Because the CE events are not continuous, the U.S. contributions are not wholly compatible with helping Norwegian theologians describe and understand such practices. Looking at the *phronesis* approach to practice did highlight how discrete the CE events in the Church of Norway are, and the need for a different or additional understanding of practice. Attending one CE event every year (maybe), in addition to going to church whenever “something special happens” is clearly not enough immersion and time for the children to be socialized into the practice of preaching. This is especially interesting because the Plan for Christian Education in the Church of Norway highlights that one of the main goals of CE is to socialize children into the community of the church. The plan advocates for a combination of discrete events, and activities that have a long time-span.<sup>66</sup> However, out of the four congregations I visited, only one mentioned a non-discrete activity. Thus for the children I have interviewed, the primary source(s) of socialization into the congregation are the individual CE events. So, if the children do not learn from experiencing expert practitioners over time, do they have a chance of learning the practice at all?

Since preaching is not recognized as a practice in a practice theoretical way, it is not taught by church staff and churchgoers. The adult leaders are aware that the children might not know or understand other parts of the worship service, like walking in a procession, reading aloud, praying aloud, or singing in a choir. They rehearse these aspects of the worship service with the children. The children are given specific instruction or rules. However, they do not receive any instruction on what to do during the preaching events. In *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, James Nieman argues that looking at preaching as a practice is helpful when teaching pastors how to preach.<sup>67</sup> I argue for an extension of this argument. By viewing preaching as a practice, it becomes possible not only to teach pastors how to preach but also to teach listeners what to do when listening to preaching. Especially in the Norwegian context of

---

<sup>63</sup> See the discussion of rules in this article under subheading: 5.2 Rules.

<sup>64</sup> In some places there are other activities that are continuous, like at St. Mary where the pastor had started a group for some of the boys.

<sup>65</sup> “Mastery of a practice cannot be gained from books or other inanimate sources, but can sometimes, though not always, be gained by prolonged social interaction with members of the culture that embeds the practice” (Karin Knorr Cetina et al., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 107).

<sup>66</sup> The Church Council, The Church of Norway, “Plan for Christian Education ‘God Gives – We Share,’” (2010). The Norwegian theologian Knut Tveitereid discusses whether the concepts of discrete/continuous and wide/deep need to be dichotomies in the CE events in the Church of Norway. My findings support his claim that even though these dichotomies were never intended to occur, they do occur in the practice field and that future CE events would benefit from exploring if it is possible to create events that are both discrete *and* deep or continuous *and* capture a wide audience (Kristin Graff-Kallevåg and Tone Stangeland Kaufman, *Byggekløss-Spiritualitet?: En Studie Av Spiritualitet I Den Norske Kirkes Trosopplæring*, vol. 13, Institutt for Kristen Oppseding (Oslo: IKO-forl., 2018), 205).

<sup>67</sup> James Nieman, “Why the Idea of Practice Matters,” in Long and Tisdale, *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, 19.

discrete CE events, teaching the practice of preaching may help children more quickly become full and active participants.

In the above, I claim that children have not become members of the practice and that they are not taught how to listen to preaching. Following this argument, one could expect that the children did not learn anything, did not listen genuinely and did not interpret at all. However, this is not the case. In all three congregations, some genuine listening and interpretation took place.

### **6.3. The Transcendence of Affectivity**

Though children are mostly not part of the shared understanding, struggle to genuinely follow the rules, and have diverging ends from the adults and the definition of the practice of preaching, these difficulties are sometimes overcome. This happens through materiality and affective spaces.

The analysis of materiality shows that introducing materiality into the preaching event is not a quick fix if the aim is to further the children's ability to listen and interpret preaching. The question is how the preacher uses materiality. Even though all the congregations deliberately use materiality with the intent of making the preaching event easier to listen to and more relevant to the children, it is only at St. Emmanuel that the materiality has this function. This calls for a different approach as to how to use materiality when preaching to children. Some of the preachers expressed a "gadget fatigue": they knew they had to figure out some symbol to bring or make a drama when preaching to children. Others loved preaching to children because of the possibility these preaching events offered for using their creativity. Either way, when preaching to children all the preachers expressed the need to do something other than what they usually do. This way of thinking probably originates from learning that children cannot process abstract thoughts like adults can, which is true. However, this can unfortunately result in preachers putting too much confidence in the materiality and forgetting that words and materials need to work together. The children in these interviews also show that they reflect on complex and existential issues. The way the *PoL bracelet* is used at St. Emmanuel shows that it is possible to be both concrete and existential.

In this analysis, I also argued that the space of the church room mattered to children. They viewed the church as a different place where you do other things than you usually do and talk about other subjects than you usually talk about. When appropriating the space of church, children make it existential and special. The affective space of the church is determined not by the walls of the church, but the feeling of being at church. Church, therefore, equals a place where "special things happen," and is closely tied to life and death rituals and experiences for children. This means that simply being in church does something to these children. This is a powerful tool and invites reflections on power relations and how to use the affective space of the church. It means that adult volunteers and church staff need to cultivate opportunities for existential conversations that open up when the children enter the affective space of church, but also that adults do not abuse this trust. Another aspect is that all the adult volunteers and the pastors wanted the children to feel at home at church, and to a certain extent downplayed the "churchiness" of church. This might be the wrong strategy. Though the children play, run, and sleep at the church, they still do not view the church as home. If the church is home, the affective space of the church that the children experienced could disappear. This does not mean that I believe that the children should not sleep at church, but that church staff and volunteers have to acknowledge that the space they are in is different.



## **7. Conclusion**

Through this article, I have argued for a new turn in the field of homiletics: a turn towards treating preaching as a practice that does not stop with the tasks of the preacher, but also includes examining what listeners do with preaching. By analyzing the empirical material from fieldwork done at CE events in the Church of Norway, I have shown that the children I have interviewed struggle to participate in the practice of preaching. The reasons why they struggle are that they mostly do not *know how to x* (listen and interpret), that they do not know all the rules of the practice, and that most of the time they have different ends for the practice than they should have. However, I also underlined that there are instances where the struggle is overcome. This happens through the use of materiality, and the church as affective space. In the discussion, I argued that to view preaching as a practice has some consequences. First, the analysis shows that we cannot take for granted that listeners listen, interpret, and reflect when they listen to preaching. They might do entirely different things, like playing Pokémon Go. Second, if preaching is viewed as a practice, it can be taught—not just to preachers, but also to listeners. However, I believe that if homileticians and preachers acknowledge these consequences and start reflecting on how to tackle them, it can lead to exciting new possibilities for the field of homiletics and the practice of preaching at large.