

Elizabeth Goodman. *Breaking and Entering: Unexpected Sermons for an Unfinished World*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 201 pages. \$26.

As I read Rev. Elizabeth Goodman's *Breaking and Entering: Unexpected Sermons for an Unfinished World*, I sheepishly realized that I expect complex, engaging preaching to be largely the realm of grand pulpits in tall-steeple churches. Goodman's congregation perhaps suspected that she bore the same assumptions; upon her arrival at her tiny Massachusetts parish in 2001, one of the seven members told her that despite the congregation's size her preaching need not be small. Goodman took that advice to heart.

*Breaking and Entering* is a collection of twenty-five of Goodman's sermons preached in her United Church of Christ congregation in Monterey, Massachusetts. The sermons are interspersed by a few "Asides"—shorter reflections that were perhaps anecdotes excerpted from longer sermons or ideas that never made the cut. Her sermons are intricate, thoughtful, wide-ranging and, yes, unexpected. For Goodman, the truth of the gospel is itself often unanticipated. In an echo of the inductive whispers and wagers of Fred Craddock and Lucy Rose, Goodman values the power of "suggestion." She writes, "The truth is, [the rhetorical device of "suggestion"] is one of my favorites. As a way to insight, a way to surprise, a way to sudden laughter, a means for art, suggestion is a powerful mode...Most crucially of all, though, is that I most often encounter God's living truth when I find it suggested to me in the many layers of Scripture, tradition, translation and experience" (14).

Goodman seems to thrive on learning and preaching in unexpected directions. Her exegesis is thorough and rigorous, often leading to semi-unorthodox conclusions. In "Obey" (25–30), she proposes that Abraham's obedience to God is not found in bringing Isaac to be sacrificed, but in Abraham's bucking of social conventions (i.e., child sacrifice, which she suggests was probably standard practice) by heeding the call to stay the execution. In "An Easy One" (135–142), Goodman interprets Jesus' command in Luke 10:37 to "Go and do likewise" as a call to emulate not the Samaritan, but the vulnerable, powerless man beset by robbers who receives mercy. Her extended illustrations lean towards the intellectual and philosophical, from the definition of religion itself (20), to a sociological understanding of awe and aweism (37–40), to the difference between the metanoia of being seen and the paranoia of being watched (48–49), to Darwin and game theory (95–102). Many of these reflections begin with, "I've been reading..." Would that all preachers read as widely as Goodman.

Though Goodman provides occasional information for the reader via footnotes—for example, that a sermon focused on race and white privilege was preached just after the jury verdicts were returned exonerating the killers of Michael Brown and Eric Garner—I frequently wished for more context to guide me. Goodman includes Scriptural texts and refers to the lectionary in her sermons, but the volume is not organized according to the liturgical calendar, and the sermons are mostly undated. Many begin with (or are interrupted by) lengthy stories or descriptions that then make a quick turn into scripture or theology, sometimes with little but an intuitive leap to tie the pieces together. Punctuation and other markings indicate some of these shifts; others read as abrupt and almost disruptive breaks in flow. Much meaning seems to be embedded in Goodman's oral delivery: turns of phrase that I had to guess were slightly sarcastic, offered with wry wit, or tainted with melancholy. I suspect that in person Goodman makes strong use of pauses and silence when she changes mood and tenor, but these are harder to gauge in words on the page. The complexity and depth of Goodman's sermons, coupled with the lack of oral and visual cues, made some of the sermons difficult to follow. In the end, both for clarity

and for richer engagement, I found I wanted to hear the sermons embodied in Goodman and her worshiping community rather than extracted and abstracted in a book.

Still, what is clear from Goodman's preaching is that she has no qualms about bringing big ideas to her small congregation (which now numbers thirty). And this may be the most important implication of her preaching: that despite our preoccupations with size, the kingdom of God can and does break and enter into even the smallness of our lives, always larger and more transformational than we expect.

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