

F. Russell Mitman. *Preaching Adverbially*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018. 184 pages. \$26.53.

Preaching, according to Russell Mitman, is not performed as an isolated act by a single person. Rather preaching is a dynamic activity performed by the whole faith community. It is embedded in the liturgical act and together they create an interactive whole. Mitman wants to shift the popular adjectival focus on preaching to an adverbial focus. He criticizes the adjectival language used to describe preaching such as “biblical preaching,” “evangelistic preaching,” “contextual preaching,” etc. Instead Mitman probes how preaching adverbially changes the act of preaching. The book consists of eleven chapters that describe preaching adverbially. These include: Preaching Biblically, Liturgically, Sacramentally, Evangelically, Contextually, Invitationally, Metaphorically, Multisensorily, Engagingly, Doxologically, and Eschatologically.

In the chapter on Preaching Biblically, Mitman raises the question of whether a sermon without a biblical text is a sermon. He uses this question as an opportunity to distinguish between biblical preaching and preaching biblically. When biblical texts engage the sermon, one is preaching biblically. When the sermon engages the biblical text, one is involved in biblical preaching. For Mitman, then, as an adjective biblical preaching involves “jacking up a sermon and running a text under it,” to use a more popular saying. In contrast, as an adverb, preaching biblically focuses the action on the biblical text which then drives the sermon.

In light of his emphasis on the biblical text, Mitman sticks quite closely to the lectionary schedule and unapologetically confesses, “I am an unrepentant lectionary preacher” (22). As a result, he would seem to oppose the adverbial phrase, “preaching theologically” and Edward Farley’s paradigm shift to preaching gospel rather than preaching text.

Describing Preaching Evangelically, Mitman demonstrates little tolerance for evangelical preachers, evangelistic preaching, evangelizing, and evangelists. He maintains they are all associated with the process of getting people to repent, convert, and be baptized. He identifies them with coercive techniques, military conquests, mind control, and fundamentalism (46-48). He wants to take the word back. To preach evangelically is to preach the gospel, to proclaim good news “through the translucent lens of a scriptural text what God is doing *now*” (49).

The chapter on Preaching Contextually describes sermons that engage the context of the hearers. He acknowledges the increasing number of “nones,” especially those who are SBNR (Spiritual But Not Religious, 72). He argues that we do not preach popular issues or problem solving or felt needs sermons, but we preach gospeling. It is not that preachers ignore what is going on in the culture, but culture does not dictate what we preach. The SBNR crowd eventually discovers that being SBNR is not enough. In that light, Mitman quotes a 1963 *Time* article about Karl Barth: “he advised young theologians ‘to take your Bible and take your newspaper and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible’” (64). Though it is debated whether Barth actually said this, Mitman’s point is that the Bible, not the newspaper, drives the conversation. He concludes that we preach “what God is saying now in the context of an assembly who live and move and have their being in a particular time and place” (75).

When it comes to the adverbial phrase Preaching Invitationally, Mitman once again takes issue with using the adjectival phrase “invitational preaching.” Invitational preaching is more the language of church growth people (78). Such preaching involves strategies designed to numerically grow churches. It appeals to those who have “dismissed” religion and relies on emotion and experience-based religion (78-79). Mitman makes a powerful statement that counters the invitational approach: “There is a crying need for a new Christian apologetic that invites these dismissers into the sacred mystery that lies beyond their own experience and

personal needs” (80). Because of secularization, entertainment overkill, and commercialization, people are led to view Christianity as irrelevant and even demonic (81).

In spite of this, Mitman is convinced that there are some who do discover that the gods of culture have let them down. Preaching invitationally “invites people into a mystery greater than themselves; preaching invitationally is enticing the assembly into the Word of God and into what God is doing *now*” (82). Along those same lines, in a later chapter Mitman concludes that worship in a postmodern world “must aim for enchantment and not entertainment” (170). Younger generations are looking for “a mystery greater than themselves” (170).

In spite of arguing that he is not splitting hairs over distinguishing between adjectival and adverbial preaching (78), it is sometimes hard to differentiate between the two. Occasionally Mitman tries to make the distinction more pronounced by creating a caricature of adjectival preaching. Despite that, Mitman provides insightful and challenging perspectives on preaching as he treats it holistically, liturgically, and adverbially.

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