

Jason C. Boyd. *The Naked Preacher: Action Research and a Practice of Preaching*. London: SCM Press, 2018. 240 pages. \$21.65.

The Naked Preacher emerges from Jason C. Boyd's post-graduate research inquiry, "What is going on when I preach a sermon?" Boyd examines the question via action research, practical theology, and Ignatian spirituality in self-reflexive collaboration with congregation members in a communicative space.

Other books have made significant contributions to congregational studies, local theology, conversational preaching, and communicative ethics; Boyd's particular contribution brings together methodologies of action research (democratic and dialogical style research emphasizing collaboration and self-reflexive critical awareness) with external "deeds" of lived theology, as well as internal development guided by Ignatian spiritual practice. This book is not a "how to" for practitioners who want to "collaborate with others to gain insight into their practices" (xiv), however; rather, it is a journey through Boyd's own processes of theoretical and practical discovery—including vulnerable insights from the successes and deficiencies of his research approaches and his interactions with congregation members.

The Introduction acquaints the reader with the concept of the "naked preacher"—which, fortunately, is not about the absence of clerical attire in the pulpit but is rather an acknowledgment of the vulnerabilities of preachers willing to see themselves reflected in the eyes of their parishioners and do the difficult work of self-analysis in collaboration with others.

Chapter 1 offers an overview of action research that explains what it is, which is a difficult task given the ambiguities and cyclical/evolutionary nature of action research. Boyd defends it as a credible form of research to scholars who may object to what they perceive as a lapse of scientific objectivity into "unreliable" subjectivity. Chapter 2 creates a bridge between action research and practical theology, negotiating the boundaries between the two and showing how action research can keep preaching and theology honest, creating a "habitus" of faith that is conscious of the potential gap between "belief" and "practice."

Chapter 3 describes the initiation process of Boyd's research, including the opening of a communicative space called "Word Café," how he orients himself and congregation members who want to participate in the research, the choices he made in terms of participants and questions, how he negotiated the ongoing tension of the insider/outsider dynamic and power relations, and other practical elements of beginning a collaborative research conversation. Chapter 4 primarily focuses on Boyd's dialogical approach to the Bible and the theology of the "word." In this chapter, Boyd uses the Lucan account of the road to Emmaus as a site from which to speak to issues of action/reflection as single praxis, the physical nature of knowing, hospitality in a communicative space, the authority of experience, de-familiarization and reflection as potentially transformative, and the importance of women's voices.

Chapter 5 encourages the practice of attentiveness, highlighting biblical examples of seeing vs. looking and hearing vs. listening. This chapter also places the concepts of "visibility" and "nakedness" in conjunction with one another in the context of dialogue, and shares some of Boyd's personal experience with the levels of self-reflection triggered by congregational observations of his preaching habits. Chapter 6 touches on the positionality of the preacher, power dynamics, guarding spaces for traditionally marginalized voices, internal struggles of being vulnerably "visible" as preacher/researcher to perceptions and feedback from the congregation, and the necessity of profound awareness. Chapter 7 provides examples of interactions that took place in the research process, and concludes the book with an "un-

conclusion,” emphasizing the ongoing, evolving, and unfinished nature of this kind of research, as well as its potential for future inquiries beyond preaching.

On the one hand, this book is a bit messy—which Boyd admits from the outset—perhaps necessarily so because it follows his journey with action research, which is itself a “messy business” (32). However, the detailed introduction of multiple new scholars and ideas in each chapter made for laborious reading in some sections. The book is heavy on theory and could perhaps have benefitted from balancing theory with more real-life practical examples of how the theories played out. On the other hand, Boyd ultimately fulfills his contract with the readers to bring them along on his research journey. His modeling of vulnerable and deeply self-reflexive collaborative work toward advancing his growth as a preacher and researcher is refreshingly honest and admirable.

While the book is called *The Naked Preacher*, preaching is not necessarily the central focus. The intersection of action research, practical theology, and Ignatian spirituality could be a generative site for collaborative research in fields beyond homiletics. This book will be of interest primarily to homileticians and others with a predilection toward research in congregational contexts, and to any brave preachers who are researchers at heart and who are willing to preach... well, “naked.”

Melanie M. Bockmann, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee