The International Journal of Homiletics

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Editorial

It was on March 11, 2020, that the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Very soon, all of us were affected by the crisis – and way too many people all over the world were and are infected. Writing these lines in July 2021, we count more than 190.000.000 cases and more than four million deaths worldwide. Whereas the vaccination rate increases rapidly in the 'global North,' there are way too few vaccines in the 'global South.' This is just one aspect showing how the health crisis is interwoven with many other crises in our global societies. In March 2020, Christian congregations worldwide had to go digital or find other ways of praying and preaching. But the crisis was not only a challenge for the forms of preaching but also its content. What could and should be said? How can people be comforted and strengthened without preaching weak and banal 'good news'? And again and again the question: How can we speak of God amid a worldwide crisis? For *Societas Homiletica* it became clear quite soon that the Budapest Conference would have to be postponed (and – God willing – we will meet in Budapest from August 12 to 17, 2022!). But our International Secretary, Prof. Dr. Theo Pleizier, came up with the idea of organizing an Online Conference on "Preaching in Time of Crisis." The International Board of Societas Homiletica supported this idea, and on August 10–12, 2020, the first Online Conference in the history of Societas Homiletica 'took place.'

We are glad and honored to present five outstanding papers delivered at the Online Conference in this Special Volume of our International Journal of Homiletics, two from Europe and three from North America (Canada and the USA).

Clara Nystrand from Lund (Sweden) compares sermons delivered in Sweden in the time of the Spanish flu 1918 with sermons delivered in the first phase of the Corona pandemic. Especially the way preachers talk about God and his:her actions differs – showing theological shifts in the past 100 years and asking questions about preaching today.

André Verweij, pastor and researcher in the Netherlands, analyzes five Easter sermons delivered in the Netherlands during the first wave of the Covid-19-pandemic and discovers a lamenting mode in preaching, which steers away from interpreting the pandemic's possible 'meaning' or 'message.'

Joseph H. Clarke and *David Csinos* from the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Canada, show how fruitful dialogue between psychotherapy and homiletics can be. They offer insight into "Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy" (ISTDP) and – knowing that preaching is *not* psychotherapy – present fruitful aspects of a conversation with this school and practice of psychotherapy for homiletics, especially in times of crisis.

David M. Stark, teaching and doing homiletical research at the University of the South in Sewanee (USA), speaks about a *dual pandemic* of COVID-19 and systemic racism. By exploring sermons from a high-church tradition to a virtual congregation Stark suggests to speak about *Eucharistic Preaching* thus connecting the sermon to its surrounding liturgy. The paper develops this notion further and discovers Eucharistic embodiment as a perspective for preaching and homiletics.

In the final article, *Edgar "Trey" Clark III* from Fuller Theology Seminary in Pasadena (USA), examines protests in support of "Black Lives Matter" and sees these protests as a form of Spirit-inspired proclamation – connecting lament and celebration, particularity and universality, word and deed.

Obviously, the COVID-19-pandemic changed not only the forms and media of preaching, but also its contents – and will have an impact also in the time ‘after’ the pandemic.

We are grateful to the authors, to our peer reviewers, to our Managing Editor Dr. Ferenc Herzig – and we hope that this Special Volume will prove to be a step in the ongoing reform and transformation of our preaching (and that many of us will meet in Budapest next year!).

Leipzig/Copenhagen/Groningen, July 2021

Alexander Deeg, Leipzig, Germany
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Preaching in Times of Pestilence – 1918 and 2020

Clara Nystrand

Abstract —— *With the help of sermon manuscripts from the time of the Spanish flu, held within the Church of Sweden, new light is shed on sermons held in the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The comparison shows, among other things, that a shift has been made in how God is portrayed. It also points to some challenging questions about suffering, hope and the role of eternity in preaching today.*

1. Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic spread all over the world in 2020, preachers encountered the difficult task of trying to find words of hope and comfort in a situation completely new both to themselves as well as to their listeners. The situation of being in a pandemic is, however, not new to the world. Preachers in different times have been facing similar challenges. In this article, I compare sermon manuscripts from 1918, the time of the Spanish flu pandemic, with sermon manuscripts from the spring of 2020 in order to see what we can learn from both differences and similarities. Mainly, I have wanted the sermons from 1918 to pose interesting and challenging questions to our time.

My key research question is: What are the main differences and similarities in content between sermons preached in the Church of Sweden during the Spanish flu pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic? I have divided my analysis into different sections as shown by the subheadings in this article.

2. Comparing Two Different Eras – Some Background

Comparing sermon manuscripts from two different times, one has to be aware of the many things that separate these times.

First of all, in the early fall of 1918, World War One was still going on. It ended in November. Even though Sweden was not *in* the war, the country still experienced hunger due to a lack of food imports and some years of bad harvests. Times were really hard.

The spring of 2020 was not difficult in the same way. It was a time highly affected by the social distancing ordered by the authorities. For the Church, this meant that it could not open its doors to gather people, as has been the case in many recent times of crisis. Another important difference is that even though the media in 1918 also wrote about the Spanish flu, the media landscape of 2020 was very different and more intense with news of the pandemic from all over the world at all times of the day.

As for the different pandemics, the Spanish flu had a much higher mortality rate than COVID-19 has had so far. More people in Sweden died from the Spanish flu in October 1918 alone than from COVID-19 during the first six months of the pandemic. November 1918 was just as bad. The number of deaths from the Spanish flu is estimated to have been over 37.000 in Sweden during the years 1918-1920. In addition, the Spanish flu killed primarily young people, those aged 20–40 years. Meanwhile, COVID-19 primarily takes

older people's lives. It may also be interesting to note that the Spanish flu in 1918 was not the only lethal infectious disease. Diphtheria and pulmonary tuberculosis amongst others were still causing about a thousand deaths every year in Sweden.[1] Compared to 1918, Sweden in 2020 before the pandemic was a rather safe place to be.

3. Method and Material

In order to shed new light on preaching during the pandemic in 2020, I started a conversation between two different sets of sermons from 1918 and 2020.

My 2020 material consists of sermons held on four days: Annunciation Sunday (22 March) and the Fifth Sunday of Lent (29 March) because this is when the pandemic really started to have an impact on daily life in Sweden and the mortality number was starting to rise, Good Friday and Easter Sunday because of the theological importance of these days. Easter also happened to be when the mortality number was at its highest for the first wave of COVID-19 in Sweden, though still centered around Stockholm and not equally spread over the whole country.[2] Out of 90 sermon manuscripts gathered, I have chosen 16 that treat the pandemic in some depth. Most of the sermons were held in churches and not only online. The date they were held on and a letter, e.g. 0329A, designate the sermon manuscripts from 2020 in this article.

My 1918 material consists of nine handwritten sermon manuscripts from the archives of Lund University Library and one published sermon. This sermon was written by *Alfred Lysander* and has possibly been adjusted in the process of publishing. Four of the ten sermons are from Thanksgiving Day, one is from New Year's Day and one from New Year's Eve. The reason for focusing on the fall of 1918 is that this is the time when the Spanish flu hit Sweden the hardest.[3] The first letter of the preacher's name and a number designates the sermon manuscripts from 1918, e.g. K1.

In writing this article, I have translated the quotes from Swedish into English. I have tried to translate as precisely as possible. Incomplete sentences in Swedish are thus translated into incomplete sentences in English.

Already in searching for material, I discovered a difference between the sermons from 1918 and 2020, namely that in the fall of 1918 the pandemic was not a large topic in sermons, but in the spring of 2020 it certainly was.

4. The Preachers

The material from 2020 has been anonymized, but for 12 out of 16 preachers I do have some information. I know that at least eight of the preachers are women and at least four are men and that the geographical spread is wide as well as the spread in age. Individual differences in style and theology are clearly discernible.

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[1] Cf. *Margareta Åman*, Spanska sjukan. Den svenska epidemin 1918–1920 och dess internationella bakgrund. Uppsala 1990, 60–68.

[2] Cf. the webpage of Folkhälsomyndigheten (public health authority) in Sweden: https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/09f821667ce64bf7be6f9f87457ed9aa (13 August 2020).

[3] Cf. ibid., 58f.

The preachers from 1918 are five. All five are men, unsurprisingly, and all of them lived in the southern part of Sweden in the diocese of Lund. According to biographical information, they were not considered controversial. A few of them are said to have been appreciated for their preaching. One, *Albert Lysander*, was even elected court chaplain later on. As seen in the sermon manuscripts as well as in what has been written about the preachers, they differ from each other in style of preaching. One of them, *Martin Blomstergren*, is described as preaching about practical life[4] while another, *Alfred Wihlborg*, is very solemn in the pulpit yet also has a simple, heartfelt approach to preaching.[5] The preacher *Nils Gillén* is described as conservative and poetic.[6] *Carl Krook* is initially described as liberal but later seen as more old-fashioned and Bible-centered.[7] Finally, *Albert Lysander* is good at combining biblical preaching with a clear understanding of his time.[8] One could elaborate more on the different preachers here, but the main point is that there is a variation between them and that none of them stood out as strange in their own time.

5. How the Disease Itself and the Situation is Described

Fear is an important word in the sermons from 2020. Half the manuscripts from this year describe the situation as frightening. The pandemic is also described as something that affects the whole of society and as something that is beyond our control. This quote illustrates all of these aspects: "Many people are afraid, worried and bewildered before that which is now happening in our society. Afraid not only of a virus that science and the doctors don't have much knowledge about, but also worried about what is happening to our society and the economy."[9] Another preacher gives us these words to describe the situation: "Pandemic, disease and death. Economic collapse – unemployment and a society that stops functioning. There are always good reasons to be afraid – because we cannot be sure of anything."[10]

As seen in the second quote, death is sometimes part of the description, but more prevalent and emphasized is fear. In the 1918 material, the situation is reversed. Only a few preachers refer to worry or fear. Instead, all of them mention the large number of deaths caused by the disease. Very often, they describe death in a rather poetic manner: "The number, by which we reckon our deceased neighbors, is on this New Year's Day larger than it has been before. This means that the angel of death has come more often to visit us."

Another difference is that in 2020 the pandemic is often depicted as something that stands out. Admittedly, it is sometimes said that pandemics have happened before and will happen again, but for the most part it is treated like something very different from

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[4] *Hilmer Wentz*, Präster, professorer, pedagoger. Minnesteckningar till prästmötet i Lund hösten 1950, in: Handlingar rörande prästmötet i Lund den 19, 20 och 21 september 1950, Lund 1961, 59.
[5] *Hilmer Wentz*, Från Lundastiftet. Personteckningar till prästmötet i Lund hösten 1956, in: Handlingar rörande prästmötet i Lund den 18, 19 och 20 september 1956, Lund 1961, 86.
[6] *Wentz* (note 4), 110f.
[7] Cf. *Albert Lysander*, De bortgångnes minne. Minnestal över präster i Lunds stift 1932–1938. Lund 1938, 47.
[8] *Christian Callmer*, Albert Lysander, in: Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon, band 24. Stockholm 1982–1984, 456.
[9] 0322H.
[10] Cf. 0322D.

normal circumstances. It is different and it changes everything. This can be compared to how in the sermons from 1918, the pandemic is often mentioned among other "misfortunes" or "trials." The best example is sermon L1, where the introduction of the sermon is centered on the question "How may one give thanks during such a rainfall of accidents?"[11] The preacher goes on to list the war, the famine, a major train accident in Sweden earlier that fall and then, finally, the pandemic. This shows how the circumstances *around* the pandemic affect the way it is perceived and described in the sermons of its time.

6. How God is Described

One question I brought into the conversation between the two sets of sermons was how the preachers would explain the pandemic theologically and how they would understand God's role in the situation. I was quite surprised to find that none of the sermons in 2020 explicitly tries to explain the pandemic. In 1918 explanations are scarce, but words like "chastisement" and "the Lord's plague" let us know that the pandemic is seen as a tool for God to teach God's people. Sermon B1 investigates what God wants humans to learn in times of disease, and preacher G2 urges his listeners not only to reflect on their own sin but also their participation in "the sins of our people."[12] But far more weight is put on explaining all the ways God is helping God's people. This is especially so on Thanksgiving Day, the day in the liturgical year when thanks are given traditionally to God for all blessings received. This shows the role of the liturgical year and the lectionary. On Thanksgiving Day, the preachers in 1918 clearly state that times are hard, but then they all turn to emphasize what God *has* done to spare people from further suffering.

Looking at God's role in the situation and comparing the two different sets of sermons, it is also clear that a shift has taken place, one that can be described as a shift in the image of God. This does not mean that everything changes. For instance, in both sets there are sermons that refer to the strength one can get from God. In 2020, one preacher puts it this way: "God is close to us in order to be the strength in our lives."[13] In 1918, one of the preachers wrote: "The love of the Lord is generous. And what one gets to receive thereof, becomes a strength also for what is to come."[14] This, however, is not how God is mostly portrayed. Other images of God play larger roles in the sermons, and that is where a shift can be observed.

6.1 Holding Our Lives in God's Hands or Standing by Our Side

In 1918, according to the sermons, life is clearly in the hands of God. Manuscript G2 provides an example: "The days of our life may thus rest in the almighty and loving hands of the Lord. The days shall not end before their measure is filled. But the Eternal One metes out that measure."[15] God as the one holding life in hand – for both good and bad – is the most prevalent and dominating image in the sermons from 1918. It also occurs in

[11] L1.
[12] G2.
[13] 0322D.
[14] G3.
[15] G2.

the 2020 manuscripts. One preacher writes, "The future rests in God's hands. From our future Christ comes to meet us. We don't need to be afraid."[16] But it is not at all as common nor as dominating as another image in 2020: that God is on our side or that God is with us. We are not alone. Illustrations of this are legion, but here are just a few examples: "God is no neutral God. God takes sides with him who fights for what is good and right."[17] "God tells us today and all days to come: Do not be afraid, I am with [you]!"[18] "You are not alone. We are not alone. God is by our side. Nothing can separate us from him."[19] "[…] no matter what difficulties we humans meet, Jesus has been there. He has himself experienced the pain."[20]

As these examples show, the connotation varies. Sometimes the point is that we are not alone, that God is here *with* us. At other times, the point is that God is on *our side* when we struggle against evil. Other times again the point is that God *also suffers* when we suffer; God is with us in our suffering. But the main idea is that God is with us. There is certainly a difference between this image and the image of God holding our lives in hand. They are not opposite images, but there has definitely been a shift.

One way to understand this shift is by looking at the theology produced in the twentieth century. For example, liberation theology emphasizes a liberating God who takes sides with the oppressed. Or consider feminist theology, which presents the image of God the friend as a balance to the image of God the Father. Or, one can consider the theology produced in response to World War II, where e.g. *Moltmann* argues that any theology done needs to have the suffering Christ at its center. Hence, there are many good arguments for such a shift, but one critical question to ponder is what kind of power God is perceived to have in this kind of preaching.

6.2 God With the People of Sweden

In the sermons from 1918, God is acting with *Sweden*. Times are hard with food rationing and the Spanish flu, but according to the sermons in this study, it could have been a lot worse if God had not saved Sweden from the war or if God had not saved the latest harvest. One preacher writes: "God has shown our people ineffable goodness. He has averted the flames of war from our borders, he has suppressed the waves of rebelliousness, he has averted real famine."[21] A little later the same preacher continues:

> The people of Sweden have indeed been in narrow straits, referred, as we have been, to our own assets, but it cannot be denied, that our country in comparison to most has been one of the luckiest in the world. A miracle it is, so great that it cannot be grasped by human thought, that our people, in spite of their ungratefulness, have been so wonderfully protected behind the shield of God's love! Who has helped us, if not G[od]. Who has been our strength and shield, if not He.[22]

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[16] 0322C.
[17] 0322C.
[18] 0322H.
[19] 0322K.
[20] 0410C.
[21] K1.
[22] Ibid.

In the material from 2020, Sweden is not an entity with which God deals. Sometimes "society" is mentioned, but then mostly to describe the effects of the pandemic. God seems to be acting either with individuals or with humanity, not with individual countries. This difference is probably best understood in the light of the nationalistic trends of the first decades of the twentieth century. The nationalistic ideas of the time did not only influence art, literature and architecture, but also theology.[23]

7. Major Themes in the Sermons

The variation between individual preachers is large. There certainly is no single theme that is prominent in every sermon from 1918 or 2020. Yet, one can discern a few interesting differences as some themes occur frequently in one year and not in the other. I shall now present the most obvious of these.

7.1 Death and Suffering – and the Horizon of Eternity

As already mentioned, in 1918 life and death are depicted as resting in God's hands. God measures our life span and decides when it is time for someone to die. In the 2020 material, this image is rare. Another difference is that death is closer and more concrete in the 1918 material. One preacher begins his sermon this way:

> To "do thanksgiving" – that is an old expression in our Swedish Church for the announcement from the pulpit every Sunday about the deaths of the week. We shall "do thanksgiving" today, as in hundreds of years before, for those who have died during the week. They are, as we know, more now than perhaps ever before in this church. When cholera raged here in the 1850s and dysentery in the 1880s, the congregation was not so big. Today there are 20 thanksgivings, in the previous weeks 11 and 12, compared to a normal average of 3–4.[24]

Another preacher writes: "Out there in Sofielund, death has during the last 2 weeks visited no less than 16 homes.[25] What if it had been your father or mother, your husband or wife, your son or daughter?"[26] In contrast, when the 2020 preachers speak of death it is mainly about Jesus' death and suffering. Or about life's victory over death through Jesus. And sometimes the preachers in 2020 talk about our fear of death. One preacher writes: "We experience, together with Jesus, all that life can hold: expectations and community, fear and anxiety, suffering and death."[27] Another preacher in 2020 talks about death in this way: "And the symbol of God's love for humanity is the cross. The cross where Jesus gave his own life. The cross that makes it possible for Jesus to walk the whole way together with every suffering person. Through the suffering, all the way to death."[28]

Death seems more abstract and not as close in the sermons from 2020. This difference is perhaps explained by the different circumstances. In 1918, more people were dying, and younger people. No one sitting in the pews knew who would be next (which some of the preachers also pointed out). In the spring of 2020, not all parts of Sweden were equally struck by the pandemic. Stockholm and a few other regions had the most deaths. For the

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[23] *Ingmar Brohed*, Sveriges kyrkohistoria. Religionsfrihetens och ekumenikens tid, Stockholm 2013, 29f.
[24] L1.
[25] Sofielund is a neighboring congregation.
[26] W1.
[27] 0412C.
[28] 0410G.

rest of the country, the deaths were perhaps less concrete, mere numbers in the news rather than actual neighbors and friends. It may also have something to do with the fact that in 2020, many of the deaths took place in retirement homes or in hospitals. And not only the deaths by COVID-19, but deaths in general. Death has a more secluded place in society in 2020.

Another difference noted in the material is how death, and also suffering, is treated. In 1918 death and suffering are not all bad. Some preachers express that you can learn something from death or from suffering. And one preacher discusses the question: "Is suffering and death from all perspectives really something evil?"[29] The preacher argues in this sermon that we should not only give thanks to God in spite of death and suffering but we should also give thanks *for* death and suffering. Another preacher builds his sermon around what we can learn from times of disease. He writes,

> When the Lord lets the cross weigh heavily on us and our surroundings, may we then make room for seriousness in our soul. May we then ponder, [xxx][30] the Lord G[od] speaking to us about the cross and may we ask him: Lord, how do you want, what do you want to teach us if you lay such chastisement upon us.[31]

The preacher then goes on to explain that times of disease can teach us to pray, to trust in the Lord, to receive help from the Lord and to confess.

I have also found this perspective of wanting to learn from both death and suffering in other sources from around 1918 outside of the sermon manuscripts. A Swedish preacher called *Martin Liljeblad*, who was working in a congregation in Helsingborg at the time of the Spanish flu, two years later published a small pamphlet called "Livets mening. Dödens härlighet. Evighetens verklighet" ("The Meaning of Life. The Glory of Death. The Reality of Eternity"). In this pamphlet, Liljeblad describes that not only is suffering an unavoidable part of human existence, it is also a part of our development. He even writes: "But woe to us, if we are not made to suffer," and explains that suffering, when received in the right way, can be a blessing. It can make people grow and teach them to rise above the small concerns of daily life.[32]

Along the same lines, the non-ordained preacher *Natanael Beskow* in October 1918 gave a lecture on death. The lecture was held on Birkagårdens Folkhögskola, a school where someone had recently died from the Spanish flu. In this solemn lecture that resembles a long sermon he calls death, "the great, healthy earnestness in life."[33] Death, writes Beskow, helps one to appreciate one's loved ones, reminds one to ask for forgiveness where one has done harm, and guides people to ask the important questions of life and to use life while it is still there.[34]

In the 2020 material, there is one example of a preacher who talks about how to prepare for one's own death and there is also one preacher who says that suffering is not

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[29] L1.
[30] The hand written manuscripts are sometimes difficult to decipher. [xxx] stands for a word I cannot read.
[31] B1.
[32] Cf. *Martin Liljeblad*, Livets mening. Dödens härlighet. Evighetens verklighet, Hälsingborg 1920, 9f.
[33] *Natanael Beskow*. Dö den – ett föredrag, Stockholm 1920, 5.
[34] Cf. ibid., 4f.

all bad since it can bring people closer to one another.[35] But for the most part, the upsides of death and suffering are reserved for 1918.

Connected to death and suffering is also what I have chosen to call "the horizon of eternity." Eternity is not the theme for any of the sermons, but it is sometimes there in the background, as a horizon towards which life is held up. This is the case for some sermons from 1918, but not for the ones from 2020. Hence, it creates a difference in perspective on death and suffering between the two different materials. It is seen in quotes like these: "Suffering – as well as our whole life and even our death – is merely a part, a small part of life eternal."[36] And, "Perhaps you felt in some such weary moment a breeze of the Lord's love touching your heart with its solace. The content of the moment then became another, richer, for something of eternity that was introduced into it. The Lord showed the strength of His love."[37]

It is also seen in this quote, where the preacher describes how it would be if God would take God's gift of grace away from us: "[…] we would grow old and die without the hope of eternal life, our dead would be buried and the survivors stand grieving by the grave without the consolation that hope of reunion can provide."[38]

Again, there are exceptions to this, and eternity *is* mentioned a few times in 2020 as well, but even when it is mentioned, it does not play a major role and does not change the perspective as much as it does in 1918. It never becomes a horizon in 2020, it is more like a dot. One preacher, however, stands out. In his sermon, he quotes a column written by theologian *Joel Halldorf*, who in his turn begins with a quote from *Karen Blixen*. He writes:

> 'You can carry all your sorrows if you are able to place them within a story.' […] This even goes for the sorrow over my own death – but for it to be able to be meaningful, I have to be part of a story that does not end there, but that is bigger than myself. […] In the Christian tradition, the word trust (förtröstan, in Swedish) describes a belief that the God of history leads everything towards a good ending. We are all a part of God's story, and God does not write a tragedy. Thus, trust does not only mean that I in particular shall be spared from suffering and death – surely not – but that evil will not have the last word. When the book is finally closed, all tears will have been wept.[39]

This quote is obviously not about eternity, yet it seems to play a somewhat similar role in the sermon: it offers a horizon against which life, death and suffering can be held up and seen from a broader perspective and also, perhaps, be given a meaning.

In his book "The Heart of Christianity"*, Marcus J. Borg* argues that there is today what he calls an "earlier paradigm" and an "emerging paradigm" in understanding Christianity. One difference he puts forward is that while the earlier paradigm has an emphasis on afterlife, the emerging paradigm is about a relationship with God here and now.[40] This might explain the differences between 1918 and 2020, but the question is, does the

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[35] Cf. 0329C and 0329A.
[36] L1.
[37] G1.
[38] W1.
[39] Cf. 0410F. The quote is from Expressen 2020-03-27.
[40] Cf. *Marcus J. Borg*, Kristendomens hjärta. Att återupptäcka den kristna tron och leva ett helhjärtat liv. Helsingfors 2015, 37–42.

emphasis on here and now leave the preachers empty-handed when trying to put suffering and death in a wider perspective?

In her book on theology in the course of the pandemic, theologian and Swedish archbishop *Antje Jackelén*, writes that when it comes to eternity, what is important is not how we define it. The important thing is to assume that there is something other than time and that time in general, and also our specific life time, stands in relation to this other, which we call eternity. She adds that "the one who assumes there is something other than time – an eternity to which time stands in relation – has more ways of handling the uncertainty of the future than the one for whom time is everything."[41]

7.2 Do Not Be Afraid

When describing the COVID-19 pandemic many preachers use words for fear, anxiety and uneasiness. Let us now take a closer look at this. In the Gospel texts for two of the Sundays represented in the 2020 material, the words "Do not be afraid" are found. On Annunciation Sunday the angel says to Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). On Easter Sunday an angel says to the women by the grave: "Do not be afraid" (Matt 28:5). These two quotes are picked up by the preachers and the phrase "do not be afraid" is a central part of many sermons. One preacher writes on Annunciation Sunday, "We do not know what the future holds, but God has a purpose for Mary's life – and God has a purpose for my life and for yours! To get to live for others. And in all that is, the angel's words for Mary and for us sound: 'Do not be afraid.'"[42] And another preacher writes for Easter Sunday: "Today we get to linger with the words "do not be afraid," whisper them to ourselves as a greeting from God.[43]

This message is not only about calming people in a worrying time. Some preachers also make it clear that fear itself is a danger. This is especially so on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, when one of the readings is from Num 21, about Moses putting a bronze serpent on a pole for everyone to see so that those who look at it are healed from their lethal snake bites. The gospel reading is from John 3, which repeats the episode in Numbers and then points to Jesus as the one to be lifted up so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. Based on these two readings, the preachers present the message that in times of fear and disease one needs to focus on God not to go astray: "That many people are afraid now is not so strange. It is human to be afraid. But if we let our fear guide us, then that is more dangerous than the danger we are afraid of. Because then we move away from love and from God."[44]

Fear is more of a theme in 2020 than in 1918. One reason for this is that the words "do not be afraid" are found in the readings. Another factor may be that the sermons from 2020 are from the beginning of the pandemic and, as one preacher puts it, "Fear is not the same as suffering. Fear is about what could happen. Suffering is about what happens here and now."[45] But then again, the preachers in 1918 clearly state that no one can know who will die next from the Spanish flu. No one is safe. There certainly must have been a

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[41] *Antje Jackelén*, Otålig i hoppet. Teologiska frågor i pandemins skugga, Stockholm 2020, 111f.
[42] 0322H.
[43] Cf. 0412C.
[44] 0329A.
[45] Ibid.

possibility for fear to take hold of people in 1918 as well. The book "Tänk om. En studie i oro" by Swedish sociologist *Roland Paulsen* presents statistics to show that the percentage of people living in Sweden with anxiety and disquiet has doubled in just the last decade.[46] This affects both adults and children and the same goes for many other countries in the world. Paulsen then shows in a variety of ways that worry and disquiet have become parts of our culture, parts of our "normal." Perhaps this is part of the reason why fear and disquiet are more prevalent in the 2020 sermons.

8. Hope – Same but Different

It is difficult, if not impossible, to analyze the hope engendered by a sermon. Something that brings hope to one person does not affect another at all. And speaking *about* hope certainly is not the same as *conveying* hope. The following investigation into what the preachers say about hope explicitly and what images they use therefore tells us something about their ambitions but little about their success.

A difference between the sermons from 2020 and those from 1918 is that the former mention the word hope more often and talk more explicitly about it. A similarity is that in both sets, God is where (most) hope comes from. In the 2020 sermons, we find this quote: "No matter what we experience right now, no matter how things are, God is close to each and every one of us and wants to give us hope and courage this Easter!"[47] In 1918, hope coming from God is expressed in this way: "It may go slowly. The Prince of Peace has mighty enemies and strong powers to overcome. There may even come major setbacks, times when it seems as if His struggle with the evil in human nature were in vain. But by and large, it still moves forward."[48]

Despite the different images of God already discussed above, we can see that both in 1918 and in 2020 one expects God to bring hope for the future. Two differences are, however, noticeable. First, hope in 1918 is the concrete expectation that God will create peace while in 2020 hope is more of a *feeling* that people, according to the sermons, need to have. Second, in 2020 hope *also* comes from human beings. In some of the sermons from 1918, the preachers say that people are only concerned with their own gain, that humanity is sick or that people complain too much.[49] There are exceptions to this, but for the most part, the five preachers in 1918 do not rely on people to bring hope. In the 2020 material on the other hand, the preachers present examples of people doing beautiful things in the time of the pandemic, to inspire hope. "On social media there are many who do what they can to give people hope. Isolated neighbors who did not talk to each other before are now gathering on the balconies and talk and play music to each other at designated times."[50] One preacher attempts to inspire the congregation to spread hope by placing post cards in the pews and encouraging the listeners to send greetings "to further spread hope and the love of God."[51] Hope is thus also found in real examples of what

[46] Cf. *Roland Paulsen*, Tänk om. En studie i oro. Stockholm, 2020, 42.
[47] 0412C.
[48] W3.
[49] Cf. K1 and G2.
[50] 0329A.
[51] 0322I.

people have done and in what the people in the congregation can do. In the 2020 material humans are seen as active agents in spreading hope.

The differences found in how hope appears in the two sets of the material calls for a further investigation of the anatomy of hope. What does hope consist of? How is hope related to faith and trust? A full analysis will not be possible in this article, but I will suggest some preliminary observations. In homiletics, hope is a central theme. *Paul Scott Wilson* writes that "hope is not the theme per se of every sermon any more than the sun is the theme of every daytime conversation. Rather, hope is the nature and tenor of the gospel, thus hope is the ultimate nature and tenor of each sermon."[52] In comparison, Jesus does not talk much about hope. He talks about the Kingdom of God and that seems to bring people hope.

From the perspective of prophetic preaching, *Walter Brueggemann* highlights that "what the prophetic tradition knows is that it could be different, and the difference can be enacted."[53] This clearly points to the difference between a well-anchored hope and a more general optimism: the former does not entice into passivity, but leads to participation in the realization of what one hopes for.

Archbishop Jackelén writes that hope uses the past as a basic experience of grace. "We all live more by what we receive than by what we do. We live by grace."[54] But, Jackelén continues, when asked what we can hope for, the answer will always be intermingled with the unknown. In this intermingling, hope resembles faith.[55]

These observations all show that hope is more than a mere feeling, and to take seriously the work of conveying hope we might need to deepen our reflection on what hope really is.

9. Summary and Final Reflection

This study shows that there are both similarities and differences in preaching in times of pestilence between 1918 and 2020. Some of the main differences are seen in how the disease itself is depicted, how God is described and in the major themes found in the sermons. A lot has happened in the years between 1918 and 2020, in the world as well as in theology. Many hard lessons have been learnt. In this particular study, the aim has been to use the 1918 material to pose challenging questions to our time. Obviously, the opposite could also be done. The 2020 material could very well challenge ideas from 1918, such as naïve nationalism. But I think that has already been done. Perhaps it is precisely a continuous reflection and critique that has led us step by step from the 1918 to the 2020 preaching, often on good grounds. What this study offers is the possibility to look back over the last century and ask what has been lost along the way. Three things stand out to me in this regard: the horizon of eternity, the view that suffering is not always entirely bad, and the insight that hope is not primarily a feeling but the result of trusting God to be able to bring about real change. In light of this study, one needs to consider: if these things have been lost, what needs to be regained and how?

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[52] *Paul Scott Wilson*, The Practice of Preaching, Nashville (TN) 2007, 49.

[53] *Walter Brueggemann*, The Prophetic Imagination (40th Anniversary Edition), Minneapolis (MN) 2018, xxxv.

[54] *Jackelén* (note 41), 111.

[55] Cf. ibid., 112.

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Preaching in a Lamenting Mode

Easter Lockdown Sermons in the Netherlands

André Verweij

Abstract ——— *As the COVID-19 pandemic brought fear and anxiety to people around the world, the Christian community is called to give witness to her hope in the risen Lord. Preaching is a major channel of this witness. The analysis of five Easter sermons, preached in April 2020 by pastors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, brings to the fore how an alarming contextual situation weighs in on the tone and content of Easter preaching in local churches. A lamenting mode of preaching was found, that voices local communities' distress and strengthens hope, repeating the salvific message of Easter in the face of bewilderment and suffering. The analysis underscores and adds to homiletical theory on lament in preaching.*

1. Introduction

Preaching on Easter Sunday is a grand but difficult task. The resurrection of Jesus as a source of hope and inspiration belongs to the very core of Christian faith. At the same time the Easter message is a mystery, and brings about confusion, raises questions in the life-worlds of Jesus' followers.[1] According to *André Resner*, "Jesus' resurrection, when sprinkled like a magic potion on any and all instances of suffering and loss, ends up more often than not increasing the weight of grief rather than being a source of comfort".[2]

Easter is celebrated in churches around the world. There is festive music and the singing of Easter hymns. The Easter story from the Gospels is read, and there is a sermon preached by the local pastor. On Easter Sunday, April 12th 2020, however, in churches in the Netherlands, festivity was far away. The COVID-19 crisis overshadowed any celebrative mood. Since Sunday, March 22nd 2020, all services were held on-line due to a nation-wide lockdown. Churches remained empty. Sermons were preached in front of a camera. Church-goers stayed at home and participated in a live-stream. There was anxiety in people's minds and hearts. In the week before Easter approximately 1300 critically ill corona-patients were being treated in Dutch ICU wards. Around 150–200 daily deaths were announced. Many families around the country were dealing with loss and grief.

This setting of crisis, on Easter Sunday 2020, raises homiletical questions: What Easter message do local preachers put forward, given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? How do they preach new life and hope, standing in an empty church, reaching out to their listeners at home?

[1] *Gerrit Immink*, Over God gesproken. Preken in theorie en praktijk, Utrecht 2018, 255.

[2] *André Resner*, Living In-Between. Lament, Justice, and the Persistence of the Gospel, Eugene (OR) 2015, 110.

I collected five Easter sermons that were preached on April 12th 2020 by local pastors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in the rural area between Rotterdam and The Hague. The (fictitious) names of the pastors are: Edward, Mat, Tatjana, Betsy, and James. After transcribing the sermons, I proceeded to segmentize, code, and analyse the sermon text, following Grounded Theory research methodology.[3]

In the Easter period of 2021, the Netherlands was again confronted by a nation-wide lockdown due to COVID-19. For the second year running Easter services were held on-line only or with very small numbers of church-goers present. My future research focuses on comparing the 2020 Easter sermons and sermons preached in the Easter period of 2021, by the same pastors, in their local churches.

2. Sensitizing concept and research question

In his homiletical study "Timing Grace", *Johan Cilliers* coins situational preaching as preaching that takes place within a certain space and a distinct time, focusing on the appearance and quality of the "here and now" in sermons.[4] Cilliers refers to the writings of the German theologian *Ernst Lange* (1927–1974), who defines the homiletical act as the effort to understand the hearers in their specific space and time.[5] Every situation calls for an act of preaching that corresponds to that situation. This implies that preaching is more than the repetition of the ancient Biblical text, such as the Gospel story of the resurrection. In the light of the Christ-promise, as witnessed to in Holy Scripture, a "new word" is spoken by the preacher that is necessary to be heard in this specific time and space.[6] The sermon is filled with the witness of the Gospel and anchored in the everyday reality of the listener. Situational preaching entails entering the homiletical tension between (a) talking to the listeners about their hopes and disappointments, the threats and possibilities of life-existence; (b) bringing to the fore the relevance and reality of the promise of Christ, in the presence of the hearing community.[7]

Cilliers' remarks on situational preaching, together with his references to the homiletical thinking of Ernst Lange, form the sensitizing concept with which I entered the research area of five Easter sermons preached by local pastors in the Netherlands.[8] The open research question was formulated as follows: Given the COVID-19 situation in the Netherlands, how do local pastors address this moment of crisis and speak a "new word", in the light of the Christ-promise on Easter Sunday?

The research resulted in the discovery of six related homiletical categories: (a) voicing communal distress; (b) identifying with the locked down disciples; (c) revisiting Good Friday; (d) repeating phrases of hope; (e) the two Mary's as exemplars; (f) listening to

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[3] *Judith Holton*, The Coding Process and Its Challenges, in: Kathy Charmaz/Antony Bryant (eds.), The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory, Los Angeles (CA) 2007, 265–289; *André Verweij*, Positioning Jesus' Suffering. A Grounded Theory of Lenten Preaching in Local Parishes, Delft 2014, 59–83.

[4] *Johan Cilliers*, Timing Grace. Reflections on the Temporality of Preaching, Stellenbosch 2019, 50.

[5] *Ernst Lange*, Predigen als Beruf. Aufsätze zu Homiletik, Liturgie und Pfarramt, München 1982, 50.

[6] Ibid., 43.

[7] *Cilliers* (note 4), 51; *Wilfried Engemann*, Homiletics. Principles and Patterns of Reasoning, Berlin/Boston 2019, 294.

[8] Sensitizing concepts are concepts that suggest to the researcher directions for examining and discerning a general sense of what is relevant. Cf. *Uwe Flick*, An Introduction to Qualitative Research. Fourth Edition, London 2009, 473.

courageous voices. Together the categories clarify how in the sermons a lamenting mode of preaching relates the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis to the Easter-hope of the local church community.

2.1 Voicing communal distress

Three of the five Easter sermons open in a parallel kind of way. Betsy, James, and Edward start off by giving voice to the situation of distress experienced by the church-community. On Easter Sunday the congregation cannot come together, the church is empty, there is no singing, there are no festivities. This communal distress includes lockdown life: loved ones cannot be visited, homes for the elderly are closed, people are afraid of the virus, and they fear becoming sick and dying. All five pastors give voice to this situation of crisis that has become part of daily life.[9]

Betsy begins her sermon as follows:

> Easter does not fit this year. An Easter like this I have never experienced before. Easter feelings are far away […] – Isn't Easter the moment we sing beautiful songs and listen to a great story? We turn out in new clothes, looking good. Easter is a day we prepare well. Everything has to turn out right. Now it's different. This day of celebration is different. The church is empty, we cannot see each other. That's not what we want.

Pastor James begins his sermon on a festive note, but after two sentences he also gives voice to the pain and fear of the community, including himself. He contrasts the joyfulness of Easter with the bitterness of the current situation:

> Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son. Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won […]. We like to sing this song in a full church, with heart and soul, as one celebrative choir […]. Now it's all different. There is nothing, nothing at all. The church is nearly empty […]. We are stricken by this. We share the fear that is around us. There isn't much happiness in our hearts today, the words of the Easter hymn appear meaningless. Is this hymn what we feel today?

At the beginning of his Easter sermon, Edward too shares the disappointment and frustration felt by all:

> On this important day of the church we want to come together in a festive service. We want to sing about faith and trust, against the darkness of the night […]. Easter 2020 is so different to what we hoped for. No festivities. It's quiet in the streets. There is fear in the air. A spooky virus is moving around, a virus that makes you sick, and can be the cause of death […]. How can we sing Hallelujah today?

Pastors Betsy, James, and Edward open their sermons with the painful chasm between lockdown life and the high note of faith and joy Easter calls for. They put forward heart-felt questions: "How can we sing Hallelujah today?" (Edward); "Is this hymn what we feel today?" (James); "Isn't Easter the moment we sing beautiful songs?" (Betsy). In this way,

[9] Pastors Mat and Tatjana also give voice to communal distress, although less explicitly in the opening part of their sermons.

the pastors give voice to a communal experience of distress and fear. The anxiety of the hearers is given speech. Their pain is named and identified as a shared pain.[10]

2.2 Identifying with the locked down disciples

Pastors Mat, Edward, James, and Betsy point to the parallel experience between the present Easter lockdown and the situation of the disciples in Jerusalem, according to St. John's Gospel. They dwell on the fears and questions of the disciples as a "mirror" of the experiences of the hearers. Putting forward this "mirror-experience" brings about: (a) points of recognition for hearers today; (b) moments of consolation, as it becomes clear how "they are where we are" and "we are where they are".

After his sermon opening, Edward points to the parallel situation of the disciples:

> I was thinking about this misery we are going through. Then I realized: this must have been the situation of the disciples too, that first Easter Sunday. No Hallelujahs. Silent streets. Living in quarantine, behind locked doors. With a shock their lives came to a standstill. There is fear in the air. Danger is everywhere. What's next? This isn't a happy Easter. They too are confounded by what's happened.

Betsy explains how on this Easter Sunday it is easier for hearers to understand the situation of the disciples in Jerusalem, whose discouragement and fear are felt today as well:

> We now understand what the disciples went through, that first Easter Sunday. We experience what they experienced, because this is our situation too. On the day of the resurrection of Jesus, there was no festive service, no large celebration. Our hearts and minds are not in the mood for a celebration, not today. Nor were the hearts of the disciples. They're scared, confused, discouraged.

After pastor James points to the situation of the disciples, he starts imagining the questions that arose in their minds, questions that remain without answers:

> Today we look the disciples in the eye and we see fear and despair. On that first day of the week they came together behind locked doors. What's going on in their minds? What questions are they asking? Why did everything work out this way? Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem in the first place? Why did God let this all happen? We recognize these thoughts, there is fear in our hearts too.

James' identifying with the locked down disciples creates room for asking questions that also surge in the hearts of the hearers: Where is God? Why does God let this happen?

[10] In his "Sermon Preached in an Empty Church", *Richard Lischer* voices the distress of standing alone in an empty church. His focus is less communal and more personal: "This morning when I came into this church to preach, my heart sank. The place was as empty as a tomb. Just me and the video recorder. Over the years I have dreamed up many a sermon, almost always alone […]. I have never delivered one in an empty church. It is strange." *Lischer* preached this sermon (on the Emmaus story) on April 26th 2020, in St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Durham, NC. *Richard Lischer*, Just Tell the Truth. A Call to Faith, Hope, and Courage, Grand Rapids (MI) 2021, 78.

Relating the COVID-19 crisis to the challenge of Easter-faith ultimately leads to a cry to God, for insight, deliverance, or just the question: Why?[11]

2.3 Revisiting Good Friday

In the days preceding Easter Sunday, the five congregations passed through Holy Week. On Good Friday they solemnly stood near the cross. There is a sharp contrast between the darkness of Good Friday and the festive mood of Easter, as the pain of the dereliction makes way for the light of a new beginning. However, in all five sermons a "revisiting" of Good Friday takes place. The solidary suffering of Jesus, his standing next to those who suffer, is brought to the fore as a salvific force that hearers need today.[12]

In pastor Mat's Easter sermon, he takes his hearers back to the cross, in order to discover who is standing next to them today:

> On Friday we sung about a lamb that took our sins upon himself. He hung there, abandoned by God and man […]. That is a consolation for everyone who feels abandoned today. Jesus knows what this is about, he knows what the patients on the ICU's are going through, in the centers for the elderly where nobody is allowed in […]. Jesus knows what this feels like […]. Good Friday is the moment we are connected to God. Without social distancing he reaches out his hand and stands near us.

Revisiting Good Friday at Easter enables Mat to revitalize the salvific themes of that liturgical day and bring to the fore how the cross of Jesus brings about consolation in the loneliness and despair many hearers are encountering.

In her Easter sermon, Tatjana also dwells by the cross. She tells the hearers about an artist and an actor, who work together, "staging" both the crucifixion and the resurrection:[13]

> Recently I saw a presentation: behind a large cloth there was an actor, moving slowly. There was also an artist. The artist was painting the cloth, following the exact movements of the actor. In her movements the actor enacted the crucifixion. The artist painted her cross-like movements on the cloth. Then suddenly the movement stopped, in death. This is the end, I thought. Then the actor picked up a knife, made a tear in the cloth, stepped through it and disappeared. Everyone was shocked. What remained was a cloth with the crucifixion painted on it, and a tear in the middle.

Together with her hearers, Tatjana focuses on the cross, telling about the movements of the actor, ending in death, and the "tear in the cloth" that represents the resurrection.

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[11] Questions like these can be compared to biblical Psalms of "disorientation", with their rhetorical questions, such as Why? and How long? According to *Mary Catherine Hilkert*, "Lament reflects the psalmist's experience of profound disorientation or dislocation in terms of both external enemies and ills […] and internal loss and confusion." *Mary Catherine Hilkert*, Naming Grace. Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination, New York 1997, 117. See also *Walter Brueggemann*, The Costly Loss of Lament, in: The Psalms: The Life of Faith, edited by Patrick Miller, Minneapolis (MN) 1995, 98–111.

[12] In my research of Lenten (and Good Friday) sermons, the proximity of Jesus (his standing close to the hearers) emerged as a redemptive arrangement of the positioning of Jesus' suffering by preachers. Hearers encounter Jesus as partaking in their suffering lives, struggling together towards redemption. *Verweij* (note 3), 89–98.

[13] Tatjana refers to a creative performance named "Ostern" by the German artist *Barbara Heinisch* (born 1944).

Here too, it is apparent that Good Friday cannot be passed over. The cross-like painting on the cloth remains for all to see, forming the prelude to the mystery of a new beginning.

2.4 Repeating phrases of hope

The five Easter sermons not only voice distress and fear. There is also a "yet" that connects anxiety to hope. From the Easter story the pastors repeat phrases of hope, such as: "Do not be afraid" or "I wish you peace". The words of the angel and of Jesus aim to console the hearers, calling for their faith-endurance. Likewise, little words such as "until", "however", and "but" are repeated in the sermons as a counterpoint to the dismay the pastors have already put forward. The repetition of phrases and little words undergird the faith-call the pastors are making.

In his sermon, pastor Mat addresses the anxiety of his hearers:

> Do not be afraid. These words may sound superficial and cheap. Do not be afraid. This is not someone trying to make you feel good […]. This is Easter's refrain, it's what the Bible is all about, do not be afraid, I am with you, do not be afraid, I know the longing of your hearts…do not be afraid, he is with you, he is in the lead, on the road to Galilee. The Lord meets us today: do not be afraid, give me your restlessness, your insecurities.

In this fragment, Mat repeats the phrase "do not be afraid" six times. The repetition of the phrase is meant to touch the hearers who may appropriate these words in their insecure and vulnerable lives.

Pastor Edward also repeats the phrase "do not be afraid", and tells the hearers how these words encouraged him personally:

> When I was preparing the sermon, I underlined these words three times over, big and thick, with my pen. Do not be afraid, you are looking for a dead Jesus, he is not here, he is risen […]. The risen Lord tells the women: do not be afraid, I underlined these words again, for myself, do not be afraid, but go and tell my brothers they must go to Galilee.

Near the end of his sermon, by repeating the word "until", pastor James calls the fear of his hearers to a halt:

> Fear reigns […] until Jesus himself appears in the room and wishes them peace. Fear reigns today […] until Jesus appears in our homes and wishes us peace. Those four words, just four: I wish you peace […]. Jesus says to us: I wish you peace. What kind of peace is this? A peace that surpasses all understanding, that overcomes fear and panic. Where Jesus comes, there is peace and all is well.

Pastor James combines a repetition of the word "until" with the repetition of Jesus' consoling words to his disciples: "I wish you peace". Given the experience of how difficult

it is to attain Easter-peace at present, repeating words and phrases may well help uplift the hearers' life of faith.[14]

2.5 The two Mary's as exemplars

The Easter sermons not only identify with the locked down disciples, they also put forward the two Mary's (from St. Matthew's Gospel) as exemplars. Their faith and obedience guide the hearers towards a similar stand for themselves. Unlike the disciples, the two Mary's do not remain in their homes, they get moving towards the grave where they encounter the angel. Then they start moving again, obeying the angel's words and meet the risen Lord. This faith-activity typifies the women. The pastors encourage the hearers to become look-a-likes of the two Mary's, moving through the COVID-crisis with bravery and strength.

While contrasting the disciples and the two Mary's, pastor Betsy stresses the women's faith-obedience:

> We don't see the disciples anywhere. They all fled. We do see the women. They come out of their homes, they leave their homes: Mary of Magdalene and the other Mary […] they follow Jesus all the way, they remain with him. They stand near the cross, they're nearby at the funeral. And now they make their way to the grave […], they obey the angel, do what he asks them to do, without any questions, they're underway already.

Pastor Edward puts forward the two Mary's as both example and personal inspiration:

> The two Mary's go. That's important, they go to the grave […] and then they go again, away from the grave. That's what really touched me in the Easter story: don't remain where you are, with all these horrible things pushing you down. Dare to leave your grave of distress and fear. Only then, only when you start moving will you meet the risen Lord.

Moving away from COVID-distress and fear in order to experience Easter joy is not easy. Pastor Tatjana says we cannot bypass distress; it is here anyhow. We can, however, move through the pain towards a newness of life as is shown by the women:

> We aren't lifted away from our problems. We can't bypass them either. But there is a route right through them, a route to the other side, where everything is safe. The women near the grave leave that place. Go and tell. That's what they do. That's the message of Easter. We cannot escape our difficulties, we must accept these hard times and then move forward, with the light of God shining upon us and going with us.

2.6 Listening to courageous voices

In addition to the positioning of the two Mary's as faith-examples for the hearers, the pastors also point out courageous and inspiring figures from recent history. For example, martyrs from the Second World War, such as *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* and *Etty Hillesum*, singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen, and the "heroes" of the present COVID-crisis who work

[14] According to *Luke Powery*, the use of repetition is one of the visible traits of a heightened, passionate rhetoric that is present in both sermonic lament and celebration. Repetition contributes to the "homiletical rhythm of lament". *Luke Powery*, Spirit Speech. Lament and Celebration in Preaching, Nashville (TN) 2009, 122.

in the hospitals and ICU wards. Listening to these voices strengthens the "yet" of the Easter sermons and encourages the hearers in their situation.

Pastor Mat begins his sermon with a reference to Etty Hillesum. He ends his sermon speaking about the witness of ICU nurse Arjan and an Armenian doctor called Gor:

> In 1942, somewhere in Amsterdam where she was hiding, just before she was deported, Etty Hillesum wrote: 'We should not hide our fears, we must face them and carry them. Yet we must not let fear take over our lives, as if fear is the only thing in the world.' That's something for us to consider today, in times of corona. We must face our fears, but must also beware of letting fear rule our lives. [beginning of the sermon]
> I read about an ICU nurse called Arjan. 'I'm not afraid,' he says. 'I know the risks, I'm in danger too, but I experience peace and blessing in the work I do.' I also saw a doctor from Armenia on television. His name is Gor. He's been on talk shows, telling what it's like to work with corona patients, to accompany them back to life or towards death. He says he meets his patients without fear. He is strengthened by Isaiah 43: Do not be afraid; I am with you; I encourage you." [End of the sermon.]

Near the end of his sermon, pastor Edward refers to the courage of Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

> This past week it was exactly seventy-five years ago that Bonhoeffer was executed, only in his thirties, like Jesus, because of his resistance and resilience. Bonhoeffer's last words were, 'This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of new life. God is with us, night and day,' he says. So we too may stand up today, stand up to whatever comes our way, with consolation and hope.

Tatjana cites the song "Anthem" by singer-songwriter *Leonard Cohen* as a consolation for hearers today:

> Just this past week someone sent me a text-message. It contained those famous words by Leonard Cohen: 'There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in.' We recognize this. This is about our lives too. We are wounded people. We need help; we live in brokenness. There are many cracks. But that's how the light gets into our lives. I saw some of this light. I saw people helping other people; I see hope entering our community; I see helping hands. It's all coming through the cracks.

Looking around in the community, Tatjana sees vulnerable people, including herself, with "cracks" of brokenness. What encourages her is how people are helping others. Their light is shining through the cracks, turning vulnerability into an occasion to bring light into other people's lives.[15]

3. Reflection and conclusion

The five Easter sermons are marked by a sense of urgency and authenticity. Standing in an empty church, using the livestream, the pastors speak from their hearts to the hearts of their hearers. The sermons are not so much "about" the tension between situational distress and Easter hope; rather, they "voice" this tension in a variety of ways. Often the

[15] *Richard Lischer* ends his "Sermon Preached in an Empty Church" (April 26th 2020) on a similar note. He refers to the courageous voices and works of luminaries, through which Christ appears in other guises: "roaming the corridors of nursing homes […] pausing to bless those who are alone and in distress […] the young man who pushes the gurney, every day exposing himself to death in order to help others […]. Is there any amazement left in us when we recognize such courage?" *Lischer* (note 10), 78f.

"I" (or "we") of the sermon is used: the person of the preacher takes part in what is at stake. Although the COVID-19 situation is omni-present in the sermons, in due course a "yet" arises from the Easter story and other stories of hope.

The first three categories: "voicing communal distress", "identifying with the locked down disciples", and "revisiting Good Friday" relate foremost to the darkness of the crisis, providing an avenue for the hearers' feelings of anxiety. However, when the pastor brings to the fore the salvific proximity of the crucified Jesus, a "new word" is spoken. Such new words appear prominently in the second three categories: "repeating phrases of hope", "the two Mary's as exemplars", and "listening to courageous voices". This "new word" is not new in the sense that it has not been heard before. It is the personal and earnest speaking of a "known word" that communicates hope in the face of a crisis situation. For example pastor Mat telling about how the Armenian doctor Gor found Isaiah's words, "Do not be afraid," to be his guide while treating COVID patients. "Do not be afraid" lightens up as a timely word that strengthens the hearers in their life-worlds.

Together the six categories clarify the practice of a lamenting mode of preaching. In homiletical theory, preaching as lament has been put forward by *Mary Catherine Hilkert*, who stresses the importance of naming pain and memories of suffering in sermons as part of a larger journey towards healing, wholeness, and joy.[16]

Sally Brown, writing in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States of America, embraces lament as a paradigm not only for practices such as prayer and pastoral caregiving, but also for preaching.[17] Brown distinguishes three types of lament sermons: (a) a pastoral lament sermon names and embraces the present experience of loss and disorientation; (b) a critical-prophetic lament sermon accents tropes of protest, imprecation, and self-examination; (c) a theological-interrogatory sermon focuses on the interrogation of the divine nature and purpose.[18] The five sermons I analyzed relate foremostly to the pastoral lament sermon, as typified by Brown, especially in the voicing of communal distress. While the sermons hardly reveal any critical-prophetic lament, interrogation of the divine nature and purpose is slightly present, for example in the questions posed by the locked down disciples in pastor James' sermon. Most questions in the sermons, however, relate to a communal sharing of distress and uncertainty.

In his study of lament and celebration in preaching, *Luke Powery* defines "sermonic lament" as preaching that is marked by six characteristics: (a) the concrete naming of the human reality of pain, whether it be individual, communal, or social; (b) a direct mode of speech that reveals an honest approach to the nature of human life; (c) self-inclusion; the one who preaches does not distance herself from the situation; (d) explicit references to faith in God and Christ, in the midst of naming the pain; (e) moving towards celebration and praise of God; (f) a heightened, passionate rhetoric that contributes to the homiletical rhythm of lament.[19]

The five sermons I analyzed follow Powery's first four characteristics quite closely: naming human reality and pain; using a direct mode of speech; self-inclusion; and

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[16] *Hilkert* (note 11), 119.

[17] *Sally Brown*, When Lament Shapes the Sermon, in: Lament. Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square, edited by Sally Brown, Patrick Miller, Louisville (KY) 2005, 28.

[18] Ibid., 29.

[19] *Powery* (note 14), 119–127.

referring to faith in God and Christ. A movement towards celebration and praise, however, is not clearly present in the sermons. Although pastor James closes his Easter sermon on a festive note, citing the verses of an Easter hymn, the other four sermons close more humbly with words of hope and consolation. Powery's sixth characteristic (of a heightened rhetoric) connects to my research category "repeating phrases of hope", in the repetitive use of Gospel phrases such as "Do not be afraid" and "I wish you peace".

Based on my research, I suggest adding to Powery's theory of sermonic lament the characteristic of "Gospel-related storytelling". In five of the six research categories, aspects of storytelling, such as portraying Biblical and historical figures as exemplars and highlighting present-day heroes, emerge as a key element of recharging faith and courage in times of trouble.[20]

In conclusion, it is clear that the five pastors, Mat, Tatjana, Betsy, Edward, and James, remain close to their local church communities even as they preach during the lockdown on Easter Sunday April 12th 2020, with the world-wide dimensions and implications of the COVID-19 crisis. The pastors preach not only to their communities, but also on behalf of and as part of the community. Steering away from interpreting the pandemic's possible meaning and message in this critical moment in history, the pastors hold on to their first and foremost calling: attending to the spiritual needs of the flock.

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[20] "Gospel-related storytelling" extends Powery's fourth characteristic of referring to faith in God and Christ, in the midst of naming the pain, with a Scripture-connected focus and concreteness.

Steer into the Storm

Dynamic Psychotherapy for Preaching in Anxious Times

Joseph H. Clarke and David M. Csinos

Abstract ——— *Global catastrophes such as the COVID-19 crisis raise individual and collective anxiety among faith communities. Fears about the well-being of loved ones, grief over the hiatus of corporate worship services, and uncertainty about the sustainability of local churches loom large. A significant challenge surrounding preaching during a pandemic is the need to speak a word to and for this anxiety. But psychotherapists know an important thing about anxiety: it contains no information. It is no more than "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal," to use St Paul's words. To reassure it away from the pulpit is tantamount to colluding with it. What if instead of attempting to soothe away anxiety in troubling times like these, the preacher and the congregation collide head-on with the feeling that resides on the other side of the anxiety? What comes into view then? This paper will bring the central tenets of dynamic psychotherapy to bear on the task of preaching amidst global catastrophe. By relying on how therapists move past anxiety to directly address the deep feelings of patients, we raise ideas for preaching sermons that go past anxiety, fear, and helplessness and steer into the storm of emotions stirring among the faith community.*

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1. Introduction

Global catastrophes such as the COVID-19 crisis raise individual and collective anxiety among faith communities. Fears about the well-being of loved ones, grief over the hiatus of corporate worship services, the sense of fracture that comes when congregations can only gather in small groups, and uncertainty about the sustainability of local churches loom large. A significant challenge for preachers amidst the pandemic is the need to speak a word to and for the individual and collective anxieties of our faith communities.

The purpose of this paper is to bring together the central tenets of Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy (ISTDP) and conversational understandings of homiletics in order to offer a preliminary new lens for addressing anxiety through preaching. As a psychological modality, ISTDP seeks to directly address the presence of anxiety. Its practical orientation naturally steers into the storm, rather than placating or avoiding the distress. Furthermore, it employs the emotional energy associated with anxiety as a driving force behind the deeper journey of excavating those buried feelings that give rise to the anxiety. The founder of ISTDP, *Habib Davanloo*, states that the method operates "with extraordinary power, capable of resolving the core neurotic structures of the most resistant longstanding psychoneurotic disturbances"[1]. Conversational approaches to

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[1] *Habib Davanloo*, Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy. Selected Papers of Habib Davanloo, MD, Toronto 2000, 1.

preaching serve as a helpful discussion partner for ISTDP because of a number of parallels or intersections that exist among these approaches and the central tenets of ISTDP.

It is the hope of this paper that the intersection of dynamic psychotherapy and preaching can open a unique path for preachers who wish to use their homiletical voices to speak clearly to our anxiety-ridden world. It begins, therefore, with an introduction to dynamic psychotherapy, particularly ISTDP, followed by a brief overview of some conversational approaches to homiletics. It is intentional that more space is allotted to the former discussion than the latter due to the relative unfamiliarity that readers of a homiletics publication may have with ISTDP. Then, by allowing these two discourses to intersect one another, the paper identifies understandings of and practices for preaching in the midst of anxious times and anxiety-ridden congregations.

2. A Crash Course in Dynamic Psychotherapy

Dynamic psychotherapy has its origin in the work of *Sigmund Freud* and his theoretical understanding of the unconscious and particularly how resistance operates. Resistance, in its many forms, functions to protect the self, but it can also cripple the self. At a very basic level, resistances serve to mollify anxiety; in order to avoid dealing with distress that emanates from more repressed and noxious feelings, people erect unconscious roadblocks that serve as resistances. Ironically, avoiding the exploration of these buried feelings only prolongs suffering and worsens anxiety. Freud recognized that resistances are intricately and powerfully tied to a person's suffering, suggesting that "[n]o stronger impression arises from the resistances during the work of analysis than of there being a force which is defending itself against every possible means of recovery and which is absolutely resolved to hold on to illness and suffering"[2].

This destructive organization within the unconscious requires a response that is honest, forceful, and willing to move into the heart of darkness. It is with this understanding that Freud's insights culminate in the creation of dynamic psychotherapy. Following in Freud's footsteps, psychological theorists such as *Franz Alexander*, *Peter Sifneos*, *David Malan*, and *Habib Davanloo* began to explore the ways in which these resistances can be relieved or even eradicated. Each of these researchers noted that when an emotion is repressed – or pushed out of sight – it becomes somatized; the destructive feeling is retained within the body. Freud remained uncertain about whether such malevolent forces in the unconscious can be removed. Toward the end of his life he noted that, "[f]or the moment we must bow to the superiority of the forces against which our efforts came to nothing"[3].

The pioneers of dynamic psychotherapy, such as Davanloo, the father of ISTDP, were not satisfied with the notion of bowing to the tyranny of the resistances. For Davanloo, the aim of dynamic psychotherapy is to "enable the patient to experience his [sic] true feelings as rapidly as possible and to the maximum degree that he [sic] can bear"[4]. Herein reside two key features of dynamic psychotherapy: first, that anxiety—either in its own right or in the form of unconscious resistances—can be addressed, and second, that anxiety and

[2] *Sigmund Freud*, Analysis Terminable and Interminable, in: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XXIII. Translated and edited by James Strachey, London 1937/1964, 242.

[3] Ibid., 243.

[4] *Habib Davanloo*, Unlocking the Unconscious. Selected Papers of Habib Davanloo, MD, Toronto 1990, 2.

the emotions it seeks to mask must be attended to expeditiously. *Alan Beeber*, in offering an overview of ISTDP, reflects that Davanloo became "disillusioned" by the way classical psychotherapy protracted the process, thus prolonging the illness.[5] It too appeared reluctant to wrestle with the core of suffering. Much early dynamic work was undertaken with patients who were highly responsive and not significantly crippled by the forces of their resistances. But in the 1970s, "Davanloo began to focus on highly resistant patients with severe phobic and obsessional neuroses, and syntonic character pathology with the aim of increasing the range of patients who could be treated"[6].

Dynamic psychotherapy, particularly ISTDP, postulates that by properly dealing with anxiety, even people who are living with some of the most debilitating resistances can experience liberation. The first steps toward emancipation take place when the therapist and patient acknowledge the presence of the anxiety. A fascinating phenomenon occurs when the therapist suggests that the therapeutic task requires that together the therapist and patient move past the anxiety, to its genesis. Essentially, the therapist is suggesting that together they examine the true nature of the distress. This simple intervention/invitation serves as a sincere message to the crippling feelings that they can and should be dealt with. Rather than soothing the anxiety, this intervention actually causes the anxiety to increase. And with this rise, resistances begin to come into view, surfacing in order to placate the distress.

Rather than avoiding anxiety, which would be to collude with the destructiveness in the unconscious of the individual, practitioners of dynamic psychotherapy seek to directly engage this reactive and harmful structure within the unconscious. Psychiatrist *Nat Kuhn* notes, "[t]o undo this suffering-inducing mechanism, patients need to face their internal conflicts without resorting to the harmful defenses. When they do this, they lose the anxiety-reducing effect of the defenses, and so anxiety rises"[7]. Essentially, good therapy welcomes the presence of anxiety and resistances. As a signalling mechanism, they let us know that something important is close to the surface. Thus, ISTDP neither backs away from nor avoids the anxiety. In actuality, writes Kuhn, "this anxiety is not simply a by-product of ISTDP but one of the elements that contributes to its motive force".[8]

The first echoes of this motive force are a part of the patient's initial moments with the therapist. At the conscious level, the presence of anxiety can be accounted for by the patient's concern that an untold story or unresolved trauma might surface. The unconscious anxiety – also present in the room – points directly to the source of the pain. Essentially, it is not the telling of the painful story nor the recalling of a traumatic event that causes the unconscious anxiety, but rather something else, something deeper.

The pathway to this deeper rupture is promoted by another principle of dynamic psychotherapy, specifically the promotion of honesty. Dynamic psychotherapy is built on an understanding that people avoid emotional honesty. This is particularly true when dealing with hostile feelings. Davanloo notes that the experiencing of true feelings can only be accomplished by "overcoming the resistance"[9]. Thus, perhaps more than Freud,

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[5] Cf. *Alan R. Beeber*, Transference Neurosis. Contributions of Habib Davanloo, in: Dominic Brewer (ed.), Psychotherapy. Methods, Outcomes, and Future Directions, New York 2016, 79–108, 80.
[6] Ibid., 81.
[7] *Nat Kuhn*, Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy. A Reference, North Charleston 2014, 11.
[8] Ibid.
[9] *Davanloo* (note 4), 1.

he suggests that the only way to alleviate the person's anguish is to honestly address and remove the resistance.

Several component parts reside at the centre of Davanloo's quest to eliminate the patient's suffering, the first of which is the *phase of inquiry*[10]. In this initial phase, the therapist begins to explore the patient's difficulties. As the inquiry proceeds, a second feature of dynamic psychotherapy takes hold: the *unconscious therapeutic alliance* (UTA). The UTA brings the patient's will into collaboration with the therapist and the therapeutic task. The therapist states clearly that the relationship will be painful, but liberating. Consciously the patient is aware that the entire process is predicated on honesty. But when the therapist and patient actually encounter the resistance and genuinely examine the sources of the pain, the UTA will be severely tested. Notes Davanloo, "[e]ach time resistance is penetrated there is marked and unmistakable increase in the strength of the therapeutic alliance"[11].

A third component of ISTDP is the *head-on collision* (HOC). The therapist places responsibility "firmly where it belongs, and that is with the patient himself [sic]"[12]. This is followed by a message directed at the patient's desire for change, by stating that there are negative implications for not being honest. This communication has a sobering effect on the unconscious. States Kuhn, the HOC "is designed to precipitate an INTRAPSYCHIC CRISIS[13] in which the UTA dominates the resistance rather than continuing to be dominated by it, resulting in an unlocked unconscious"[14]. For Davanloo, the HOC does not precipitate an intrapsychic conflict as much as it brings the obvious tension into view. *Catherine Hickey* notes that the HOC is a joint venture between the therapist and the patient.[15] She goes on to state, "Davanloo argues that psychotherapy should promote adult autonomy and freedom. It should not promote childlike dependence and regression"[16].

Fortified by the UTA and the HOC, the therapist and patient move in the direction of the pain. The resistance tests the UTA, but the HOC counters the forces of the resistance. Due to the fact that the resistances are connected to strong emotions that the patient wants to keep out of the realm of consciousness, such as guilt and grief, these internal forces will not go quietly into the night. By adhering to a profound respect for the patient's yearning for freedom, the therapist continues to invite the patient into a deeper and more honest conversation.

This dynamic conversation has implications for the relationship between the therapist and the patient. The feelings associated with this relationship possess their own integrity. In ISTDP, the therapist begins to explore the feelings in the transference. This shift – a critical dimension of ISTDP – instantly intensifies the journey. Working in the transference gives the process an immediacy; the defenses are laid bare by the very present reality that they are alive and active within the therapeutic context. The

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[10] *Davanloo* (note 1), 38.
[11] Ibid., 3.
[12] *Davanloo* (note 4), 7.
[13] The use of upper case is in the original text.
[14] *Kuhn* (note 7), 125.
[15] Cf. *Catherine Hickey*, Understanding Davanloo's Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy. A Guide for Clinicians, London 2016, 60.
[16] Ibid.

transference also gives rise to clashing feelings "because the patient has conflict over his [sic] anger which has its unconscious link with unconscious repressed sadistic impulses in relation to the past, and the positive because in the past warmth and closeness have always ended in disappointment"[17].

Davanloo argues that resistances move into the therapeutic relationship, often giving rise to anger as a common defense. As the patient and therapist focus their efforts on getting at the origin of the distress, the patient's unconscious may begin to experience strong negative feelings toward the therapist. The presence of transference feelings toward the therapist indicates that the therapist and patient are indeed drawing closer to the epicenter of the pain. When transference feelings are experienced in the therapeutic relationship, "the therapist must be on the look out for when the patient's transference feeling are becoming an issue and he [sic] makes an intervention designed to bring them into the open. The intervention might consist of asking the question 'How do you feel right now?' or after describing a pattern in some outside relationship of drawing attention to the parallel with the transference by asking 'How about here with me?'"[18]. Davanloo goes on to note that the patient's "initial response to such an intervention is almost invariably resistance"[19]. Working in the transference is useful because it accesses actual feelings people are experiencing in the present. Rather than talking about a perceived emotion or feelings attached to other events, transferential feelings mean that the vault containing the more crippling emotions is close to the surface.

3. A Conversational Conversation

After this overview of ISTDP, it is worth pausing to acknowledge that preaching is not dynamic psychotherapy. Similarly, homilists are not therapists. Thus, there are processes and practices of ISTDP that are at best fool-hearty ventures to appropriate in the pulpit. For example, inviting the congregation to explore feelings of transference toward the preacher might result in more than a conscientious preacher can manage. But if the preacher and the congregation are willing to explore difficult, crises-born, anxiety-ridden issues together, then there are elements of dynamic psychotherapy that may prove fruitful. At minimum, an awareness of dynamic psychotherapy minimizes the risk to both the preacher and the congregation as they steer together into the storms of life, all while expediting the process of addressing the true sources of distress.

ISTDP is born out of the relationship between therapist and patient and undertaken through conversation between these parties. In a similar way, homileticians in the past few decades have proposed theories and experimented with practices that see preaching as a proclamation of the gospel in a conversational mode.

Lucy Atkinson Rose offered a brief article in which she put forward a proposal for conversational preaching. Using the driving metaphor of a round table at which preacher and congregants alike have a place, she argued that a goal of preaching is "to gather the community of faith around the Word where the central conversations of the church are refocused and fostered"[20]. Rather than being the resident expert in biblical interpretation

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[17] *Davanloo* (note 4), 109.
[18] *Davanloo* (note 1), 222.
[19] Ibid, 222f.
[20] *Lucy Atkinson Rose*, Conversational Preaching. A Proposal, in: Journal for Preachers 19, no. 1 (1995), 26–30, 27.

and doctrinal theology, the preacher is a facilitator of sorts; she may be the only one to speak during the sermon, but in so doing she invites the entire congregation to join her in the process of exploring scripture and generating its meanings for one's contemporary context. Week in and week out, sermon after sermon, the faith community comes together as a priesthood of *all* believers to explore God's Word, generate interpretations, and offer claims – however tentative they may be – about the directions in which God is pointing the church today.

Rose makes it clear that this approach to preaching is "communal, heuristic, and nonhierarchical"[21]. In expanding on these ideas in *Sharing the Word*, she distinguishes her use of *conversation* from more formal, technical definitions used by late twentieth-century practical theologians. Rather, the sort of conversation she infuses into the homiletical imagination is very personal, one carried out in "an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect"[22] and the acknowledgement of contextual realties shaping each person and the community at large. Yet, while all members of the congregation have an equal place at the table and voice in the conversation, the preacher is the one tasked with guiding the discussion through the medium of a sermon. The sermon, then, communicates the preacher's wager, the new insights that developed in her heart and mind through her interplay of text and context.[23]

A decade after Rose's proposal, *O. Wesley Allen* offered his own conversational homiletic. In acknowledging homileticians and preachers who propose conversation during the sermon,[24] before the sermon,[25] or even conversational sermons,[26] Allen broadens the dialogical nature of the church to see conversation as central to its very existence. His conversational homiletic engages monological preaching as simply one method for the much broader and deeper communal proclamation of the church.[27]

Instead of making the preacher and the sermon that the preacher offers the points of focus for the conversation it engenders, Allen argues that it is the congregation itself that is at the center of its communal discernment.[28] The entire faith community is a community of conversation, a term that Allen carefully defines not as debate or discourse for persuasion, but as dialogue for conversion, that is, a "'turning together,' or mutual conversion" in which all parties are transformed.[29] Like Rose, Allen upholds mutuality as a necessary characteristic for the egalitarian community he imagines. While people bring different levels of knowledge, intellectual abilities, and personal experiences,[30] God's omnipresence empowers everyone with a voice and a stake in the conversation. "If God is everywhere," he writes, "then *everyone* has experienced God and can participate in give-and-take God-talk"[31]. The preacher's role, then, is to use the monological sermon to point

[21] Ibid., 29.
[22] *Lucy Atkinson Rose*, Sharing the Word. Preaching in the Roundtable Church, Louisville 1997, 9.
[23] See also David Schnasa Jacobsen (ed.), Homiletical Theology. Preaching as Doing Theology, Eugene, OR 2015.
[24] For example, *Doug Pagitt*, Preaching in the Inventive Age, Nashville 2014.
[25] For example, *John S. McClure*, The Roundtable Pulpit. Where Leadership and Preaching Meet, Nashville 1995.
[26] Such as *Rose* (notes 20 and 22).
[27] Cf. *O. Wesley Allen, Jr.*, The Homiletic of A Believers. A Conversational Approach, Louisville 2005, 16.
[28] Cf. ibid., 14f.
[29] Ibid., 22.
[30] Cf. ibid., 25.
[31] Ibid., 44.

to God's presence that is always and everywhere in the life of the congregation.[32] The sermon is just one moment in time among the broader conversation that is wrapped up with the life of the church. It is not our individual sermons, but this broader conversation, this ongoing and unending eschatological dialogue, that transforms individuals and the wider faith community.

Conversational preachers are in it for the long haul. There are no instantaneous results nor quick solutions that these approaches to preaching guarantee. Much like ISTDP, it is about building a relationship of honesty, one through which the congregation engages in difficult and determined work that can release it to join God in what God is doing in the congregation and the world in which it lives.

4. The Beautiful Danger

Preaching is not psychotherapy. The shift from a focus on the preacher and the preacher's words to the congregation engaged in a homiletical conversation does not create the space for individuals to explore the deep recesses of their inner lives. However, while not becoming therapists, preachers may find rudimentary features of ISTDP useful for proclaiming the good news among an anxiety-laden congregation.

For example, acknowledging the anxiety that many are feeling is an honest appraisal of the trauma-filled climate of our current pandemic culture. Having named this reality, preachers can move into the actual experience of this anxiety by noting the ways in which COVID-19 and its various protocols have altered life, created job loss, limited social interaction, increased tensions at home, and created personal, familial, and community uncertainty. Then they can address the particular ways that this pandemic is being felt within a church context by recognizing the loss of community worship, the loss of corporate singing, the loss of the familiar, and the overarching knowledge that many churches will not survive the pandemic and its aftermath. Referencing these realities will naturally stimulate the neurobiological pathway of anxiety. Members of the congregation, whether donning face masks in a live worship setting or listening to the message in the relative safety of their own homes, will sigh. They might fidget. They may even become upset.

These responses are indicators that the anxiety among the congregation is real. As one invites the congregation to gather around a metaphorical table where they can penetrate scripture to find the truth therein, the preacher can ask if the members of the congregation would like to explore the feelings lodged beneath the community's collective anxiety. One must acknowledge that such a collaborative anxiety-penetrating venture could be turbulent. Yet, the lived experience that has given rise to such important conversations surrounds the fact that times are indeed turbulent. The preacher and the people are simply acknowledging the reality of this moment.

This point in the journey often produces a wonderful irony. In a therapist-patient setting, the therapist might ask, "How are you feeling right now?," to which patients often respond with a word like "Hopeful." Why would someone feel hopeful when the bleak landscape of a pandemic-ravaged world had just been accurately laid out before them? One of the therapeutic qualities of ISTDP is that it takes seriously the lived reality of the trauma. As a therapist moves toward an unconscious therapeutic alliance, the patient's

[32] Cf. ibid.

experiences are acknowledged and heard. Likewise, by asking a congregation if they want to "turn together"[33] toward their anxiety, the people recognize that someone is taking them seriously. It may pass through one's mind that this preacher is not minimizing one's reality, nor are they avoiding it. By going into the storm, the preacher is embodying a sense of hope.

Dynamic psychotherapy is dangerous precisely because it goes as rapidly as possible to the heart of the matter, predicated on a commitment to honesty and the hope-filled alleviation of pain. The sort of preaching that scholars like Rose and Allen propose is no less daring. For example, gathering around scripture is dangerous specifically because it offers a pathway to truth, hope, and healing. It invites us into a deeper relationship with the divine (and if that is not frightening, nothing is!). As noted throughout this paper, we live in a time of extreme anxiety that, if left unacknowledged and unregulated, will cause us to make mistakes and, even worse, critical errors in judgement. The best antidote to the misery born of anxiety is to find its source. Dynamic inquiry through preaching uses the scalpel of scripture to cut through the vast array of defenses that anxiety uses to avoid taking this precarious journey. The paradox is self-evident: a potentially lethal tool (scripture, with its implicit desire for honesty and freedom) is used to engage the most crippling and volatile of human defenses (anxiety).

The wager of the preacher dares the community to seek out new directions. Catastrophes, trauma, disasters, social and ecclesial collapse, and the loss of a way of life all sit on the horizon, threatening to impact the emotive world of our parishioners. Conversational preaching in the key of ISTDP invites us to move directly toward the feelings and reactions that such realities evoke. Such preaching contains the posing of a dilemma, an ache, or a profound question around which the community gathers. As the preacher and congregation move together into the issue, members of the congregation need to be invited into the journey while at the same time being warned that such a sojourn will make demands on them. A gift that dynamic psychotherapy can offer preaching is that of moving directly toward the problem, for therapeutic success within a dynamic lens is built on the therapist responding to the patient's resistance, thus steering the process directly into the storm.

What is revealed by moving headfirst into the storm? What is gained by inviting people to feel the fullness of their anxiety, anger, and desperation? This adherence to honesty, the exploration of the ache, and the vigilant search for feeling creates an "Intrapsychic Crisis"[34] through which one traverses in order to move past the resistances and the anxiety. The crisis "loosens the whole psychic system as it reverberates with the core of the psychopathological dynamic forces"[35]. In this way, it leads to the "resolution of the residual resistance with partial or major de-repression of current or present past and distant past conflicts"[36]. Preaching that relies on ISTDP offers the hope of freedom from the forces that give rise to anxiety by naming them, turning toward them, and leading the congregation past resistances and into the crisis itself order to identify a resolution. Like conversational preaching, it is only when the preacher and parishioners alike join

[33] Ibid., 22.
[34] *Davanloo* (note 4), 102.
[35] *Beeber* (note 2), 20.
[36] *Davanloo* (note 4), 102.

together as equally-empowered members of the process that the storm can be weathered and withstood.

5. Concluding Thoughts

It is not possible to suggest that a proper conclusion can be scripted. This is the beginning of a conversation, one in which preachers in our current anxiety-ridden age enter into relationship with psychological concepts that are particularly constructed to enable us to address extremely difficult issues. In offering a synthesis of this paper, we raise two ideas that serve as initial way markers for guiding preachers on a path into the storm.

First, a blending of ISTDP and conversational preaching uses honesty, a frank appraisal of current circumstances, and an open invitation for exploration to accentuate and then move past anxiety. There is no hope for conversational preaching to penetrate fear and pain unless the congregation as a whole desires change. As a therapist invites a patient into deeper and deeper conversations, preachers begin by affirming the process and asking the congregation to go deeper with every sermon. In this way the broader, ongoing conversation of the faith community moves further and further into the process. Of course, we will encounter individuals who resist, those who do not want to feel the pain that resides at the heart of their anxiety. But, recognizing the journey as a *communal* endeavour, the preacher repeatedly extends a hand to the congregation and invites them as a collective to move deeper into the heart of their anxiety.

Second, it is important to remember that although the first three letters of ISTDP stand for *intensive* and *short-term*, relying on aspects of this approach does not result in a homiletical process that occurs in one sermon alone (nor in one therapeutic session). ISTDP is an expedient approach, but when carried out in the pulpit, it becomes an ongoing conversation. Preachers must actively solicit, receive, and rely on feedback, which is crucial to therapeutic practice and preaching alike. Honest and insightful feedback that goes beyond a "Nice sermon, pastor" on the way out of church allows preachers to see what communal resistances have been penetrated as they move toward the head-on collision between the congregation and the true sources of their anxiety. It lets preachers know where they need to move, how far they need to probe, and when they need to back off to allow some members of the church to catch up to the rest of the group.

Preachers are not therapists. But if, as Allen states, God is everywhere and no topic is off limits within the conversations of the church,[37] then God's presence seeps deep into the process of ISTDP. Steering into the storm is painful. When we preach in ways that move us into the heart and eventually past the intense anxieties raging in the waters of our congregations, we embark on a journey that changes us. The pain is real. But through the process is the hope of liberation, a hope of calmer waters on the other side of the storm. This communal transformation that we undergo with our congregations is the work of God. So when the dark clouds of anxiety hover among our communities, let us turn our rudders toward them. God is already in the storm, ready to guide us through it together.

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[37] Cf. *Allen* (note 27), 44.

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Eucharistic Preaching as Early Response to a Dual Pandemic

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Abstract ——— *This paper examines the preaching at Washington National Cathedral as a response to the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and systemic racism in the United States. Drawing on research from over forty sermons from high church traditions and comparing it with analysis of sermons on Palm Sunday and Easter this paper will show how preachers in high church traditions, accustomed to preaching in the presence of eucharist, adapted their proclamation to respond to a virtual congregation and the absence of in-person communion. Then, the paper examines how* Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde *and* Presiding Bishop Michael Curry *further develop elements of eucharistic preaching in Pentecost and Trinity Sunday sermons to respond to the murder of* George Floyd*. Among other things, Budde and Curry's sermons call for confession, evoke anamnesis, employ liturgical music, invite embodiment, and offer Christ as broken body and resurrected hope to target systemic racism. These sermonic examples show how the theology and rhetoric of the eucharistic liturgy can be a resource for preaching that more effectively confronts the challenges of a dual pandemic.*

"When preaching occurs in the context of the eucharist, the homily is not the primary narrative but an integral part of the larger narrative of the eucharist itself"[1].

"Communion tables with open Bibles on stands, empty crosses, chalices, and collection plates must never end up speaking more eloquently of God and salvation than the preachers in the pulpit and the people in the pews"[2].

1. Introduction

What *Mary Catherine Hilkert* addresses from a Catholic, liturgical perspective, *Cleo LaRue* emphasizes from an African American preaching perspective, namely, preaching, Eucharist, and the work of the people of God are most effective when they are interconnected in the proclamation of the good news. Or, as Episcopal homiletician, *Bill Hethcock*, once said, "the spirit of celebrating the liturgy together with the people" is essential to effective preaching.[3] The problem is that preaching, celebrating, and doing much of anything together with the people is more of a challenge in a time of pandemic.

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[1] *Mary Catherine Hilkert*, Naming Grace, Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination, New York 1997, 101.
[2] *Cleophus LaRue*, Rethinking Celebration. From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching, Louisville 2016, 72.
[3] *William Hethcock*, Preaching at the Eucharist, in: Sewanee Theological Review 39.2 (1996), 131–146, 139.

This paper examines how elements of eucharistic celebration can be reimagined and re-incorporated into preaching that confronts the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and systemic racism in the United States. It explores how preachers in high church traditions, accustomed to preaching in the presence of Eucharist, preach in ways that respond to a virtual congregation, to the absence of in-person communion, and to the murder of *George Floyd* as a visible reminder of the ongoing problem of systemic racism. While this is largely a descriptive project, my interest is in how eucharistic elements can be a resource for preachers to draw upon to confront the pressing needs of the church and the world today.

After defining how I mark and evaluate eucharistic preaching, I summarize data from a survey of forty-five sermons in high church traditions from mid-March to mid-April 2020 as a way of describing the change that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the Church. Next, I focus upon preaching in The Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. This Cathedral is a well-resourced and nationally important voice in the Episcopal Church and in the nation. The sermons I analyze here from Pentecost and Trinity Sunday occur during the weeks of the murder of George Floyd and protests of his murder. Following this analysis, I offer thoughts about how the sermons from the Washington National Cathedral might help preachers draw upon eucharistic elements to confront a viral pandemic and the pandemic of systemic racism.

2. Markers of Eucharistic Preaching

There are many different ways to define and understand Eucharist. Indeed, even the word Eucharist is not something that is universally applied in the theology and practice of different churches. I enter this conversation from a particular perspective as a Methodist, teaching at an Episcopal Seminary, and examining preaching in an Episcopal Cathedral. Among other things, this means that I am interested in how preaching (1) calls for confession, (2) evokes the *anamnesis* of God's saving acts, (3) employs liturgy and music, (4) invites the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*), (5) commissions embodiment, and (6) offers Christ as broken body and resurrected hope. While other eucharistic markers might be suggested, these six can be effectively engaged in preaching that confronts COVID-19 and systemic racism.

Further, my thinking about eucharistic preaching has been helpfully re-shaped by an understanding of the role of celebration in African American preaching. Henry Mitchell wrote that the goal of celebratory preaching "is an *experience* of the Word, which plants the Word deep in human consciousness"[4]. *Frank Thomas* then expanded on celebration, calling it the culmination "where a moment is created in which the remembrance of a redemptive past and/or the conviction of a liberated future transforms the events immediately experienced"[5]. And, recently, *Cleo LaRue* argued that celebration in African American preaching must be defined as "'ritual acts of worshipful praise' […] that acknowledge God's greatness and power"[6].

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[4] *Henry Mitchell*, Celebration and Experience in Preaching. Revised Edition, Nashville 2008, 59.
[5] *Frank Thomas*, They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching, Cleveland 2013, 49.
[6] *LaRue* (note 2), 69f.

These definitions seem to offer some ways in which we might think differently about the connection between Eucharist, celebration, and preaching. They push us to move beyond matters of rhetoric or liturgical forms to preach toward doxology, eschatological liberation, and action for transformation today.

3. Eucharistic Preaching During the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In the Spring of 2020 as the pandemic set-in, I asked the students in my Advanced Preaching class[7] to examine how preachers were handling the changes that quarantine brought to worship and preaching. Together we examined forty-five sermons preached from mid-March to mid-April in high church traditions that typically celebrated the Eucharist after the sermon. This study provides a helpful baseline for understanding how preaching in these traditions was affected by COVID-19. Among other things, it found that thirty-two of the forty-five sermons were preached as part of a continuous, live-streamed service.[8] Thirty-one of those continuously-streamed services were held in a church sanctuary rather than in a home or other location.[9] Most importantly for this study, only seven sermons were followed with a Eucharistic celebration in which the participants present consumed the host. Thirty-one churches switched their liturgy to a form of Morning Prayer, thus eliminating Eucharist from the day's liturgy.[10] A minority – seven churches – celebrated a form of ocular Eucharist in which the regular liturgy was celebrated but no one, not even the presiding priest, communed. Thus, survey data suggests that as COVID-19 curtailed the practice of celebrating Eucharist, the majority of communities within high church traditions sought to recreate an experience of the church's corporate worship life as best they could. Because the liturgy changed, the *image* of worship in the sanctuary seems to take on more of a quasi-sacramental role as a symbol of reflection and of mediated grace for the physically distanced congregation.

A similar strategy is reflected in the content of the sermons. Researchers found that preachers drew on several eucharistic and liturgical approaches in their sermons. Preachers regularly confessed not sin so much as pain and congregational vulnerability. They invited hearers into "a new perception of hope of God's last word, despite the realities of our grief" (Neislar). Preachers also more frequently used stories, poetry, music, and images to connect hearers with the larger story. One preacher even preached from the altar with a chalice in front of him (Hartsough). At the same time, preachers proclaimed hope, embodied their words, and showed uncommon passion and energy when compared to pre-COVID norms.[11] All of these findings point to subtle shifts and

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[7] Special thanks to *John Church, David Goodpastor, Mary Hagerty, Bernie Hartsough, Gray Hodsdon, Melissa Howell, Brandon Hudson, Murdock Jones, Maribeth Manoff, Andrew McLarty, Ranie Neislar, Michelle Simmons, John Simpson, Noah Stansbury,* and *William Stokes*.

[8] Twelve sermons were recorded and mixed with other pre-recorded videos to present an entire liturgy. One sermon was audio-streamed, thus I could not determine the location of the sermon in relation to the rest of the liturgy.

[9] Thirteen sermons were preached outside of a church and two sermons were recorded in a way that I could not determine their location.

[10] Twenty-two churches held Morning Prayer or a prayer service that did not include a Eucharistic liturgy. Another nine churches included sermons within a liturgy that seemed not to include Eucharist, but because of recording and access issues, could not be verified.

[11] Many preachers attempted to connect their hearers more directly with the narrative of resurrection and to help them *feel* companionship with God. They sought to *evoke* grace in one's individual relationship with

added emphases in preaching that connect hearers with elements of the lost celebration of the Eucharist.

Two sermons from the Washington National Cathedral further illustrate an early-pandemic eucharistic homiletic response. These services were streamed continuously from the sanctuary. While the eucharistic liturgy was celebrated, after March 15 the Cathedral switched to ocular Eucharist combined with a prayer that emphasized the spiritual presence of Christ with the viewer.[12]

On Palm Sunday *Bishop Mariann Budde* preached from the pulpit of the Cathedral. Her sermon focused on the Gospel reading from the Revised Common Lectionary and addressed Christ's approach to suffering during Holy Week, combining it with the Serenity Prayer.[13] Budde's sermon employs five of the six markers of Eucharistic preaching. While she does not focus on the Spirit's work (#4 in our list of markers), Budde does employ a quasi-ritual of *confession*, calling listeners to "dare to name aloud" how they are hurt and scared, while also inviting them to receive a word of grace meant to offer guidance and reassurance (#1). She uses *anamnesis* to lift up Holy Week, focusing especially on Palm Sunday and the Garden of Gethsemane, as examples of serenity in the face of suffering (#2). She emphasizes the Serenity Prayer (3 x's) and invites her distanced hearers to use *prayers and liturgical elements* from Holy Week as conduits of grace (#3). She encourages her hearers to *embody* God's grace and Christ's intentional and accepting response in facing the challenges of the pandemic (#5). And, she offers Christ's broken and resurrected experience of Holy Week as a sign that God will help us through suffering (#6).

A second example of preaching during the onset of COVID-19 is *Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's* Easter Sunday Sermon. Though he preached from his office, the rest of the service was live streamed from the Washington National Cathedral. The central theme and primary moves of Curry's sermon are captured in this one run: "It may not look like Easter. It may not smell like Easter. It may not even feel like Easter, but it's Easter anyway. And trusting that, we can make it."[14] Curry's sermon *confesses* the fear, death, physical distance, and grief brought on by a viral pandemic (#1). He employs *anamnesis* (#2) to recount how God raises Jesus (#6) to deliver Easter hope even though it didn't feel like Easter on that first Sunday morning. Curry draws heavily on *liturgy and music* (#3). He cites *The Strife is O'er,* preaches about "a weepin' and a wailin" from the spiritual, *Soon-A Will Be Done*, quotes *O Love that wilt not let me go,* alludes to *God Will Take Care of You,* and concludes his sermon by singing an entire verse of *He's Got the Whole World in His*

God and hope for our wider society. And they looked to foster an *experience* of coming before the face of the loving God (Research from *Hudson*, *Stansbury*, and *Stokes*).

[12] The prayer used after the consecration of the elements was, "My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen [from St. Alphonsus de Liguori*,* 1696–1787]."

[13] *Mariann Budde*, Palm Sunday Sermon, Washington National Cathedral, April 5, 2020, https://youtu.be/PbBMjiP7LwM [accessed July 27, 2020]. The version of the prayer *Budde* cites is the one most commonly used in AA: "God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

[14] *Michael Curry*, Easter Sunday Sermon, Washington National Cathedral, April 12, 2020, https://youtu.be/lPV2KYaGO-U [accessed July 28, 2020].

Hands. With this superabundance of music, Curry hopes to “express the ineffable”[15] and bring his congregation to experience what Howard Thurman described as the *Spirit* of God “beating out its rhythmic chant in my own spirit”[16] (#4). Finally, by commending the witness of the women at the tomb, Curry inculcates an *embodied* response of love, determination, and hope in the face of the deathly challenge of COVID-19 (#5).

Like Curry and Budde’s preaching, many of these early sermons seek to offer consolation and assurance of God’s presence at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They do not confess sin so much as name pain and invite vulnerability. They use *anamnesis*, not to recount the Lord’s Supper, but to remember the suffering and deliverance of Christ and his followers in ancient times of fear. They call listeners to embody faith, persistence, and the love of Christ. And, and they regularly offer the *spiritual presence* of God through non-eucharistic *liturgies and music*.

Still, speaking words of comfort in times of trial should not be understood as merely pastoral. These preachers also offer prophetic witness that seeks a different future. As Budde writes elsewhere, “To speak of God’s presence and comfort in times of trial is as true to prophetic speech as is speaking the harder truths of judgment”[17]. In this way the preaching examined here from March and April helps lay a foundation for a another, more overt, prophetic response at Pentecost that not only grapples with COVID-19 but confronts the pandemic of systemic racism in the United States as made painfully visible in the murder of George Floyd.

4. Eucharistic Preaching as Response to a Dual Pandemic

On May 25, 2020, *George Floyd* was murdered by Minneapolis police during an arrest when a white police officer knelt on Floyd’s neck for nine and a half minutes[18]. The murder and Floyd’s plea for his deceased mother were captured on video for the world to see. Six days later, *Presiding Bishop Michael Curry* preached a Pentecost sermon at the Washington National Cathedral. Curry’s sermon theme was “Pentecost in a pandemic,” and it was clear from the beginning that Curry was not only speaking about a viral pandemic:

> We really do observe this Pentecost in the midst of a pandemic. The pandemic of COVID-19 is real. It is painful, and we pray that scientists and researchers and all of the folk who are working hard will find a way to bring this pandemic to an end. But there is another pandemic – not of the viral kind, but of the spiritual kind. It is a pandemic of the human spirit when our lives are focused on ourselves, when the self becomes the center of the world and of the universe.[19]

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[15] *William Turner, Jr.,* The Musicality of Black Preaching, in: Performance in Preaching. Bringing the Sermon to Life, edited by Jana Childers and Clayton Schmit, Grand Rapids 2008, 191–210, 201.

[16] *Howard Thurman*, Jesus and the Disinherited. Boston 1996, 47.

[17] *Mariann Edgar Budde*, Gathering Up the Fragments: Preaching as Spiritual Practice. Lima, OH 2009, 65.

[18] *Evan Hill/Ainara Tiefenthäler/Christiaan Triebert*, et. al., How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody, in: New York Times, May 31, 2020; Updated July 28, 2020: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html.

[19] *Michael Curry*, Pentecost Sunday Sermon, Washington National Cathedral, May 31, 2020, https://youtu.be/mp396jzWHrs [accessed July 29, 2020].

As his sermon develops, Curry further explains what he means by spiritual pandemic. In so doing, he calls his hearers to personal and corporate confession (#1). Curry preaches that we have too easily given into a "self-centeredness" that is the "root of evil," leading us to despise and reject the image of God in others. And, corporately, Curry says, we have become too comfortable with a racial and cultural self-centeredness that perpetuates a system wherein George Floyd's murder "wasn't an isolated incident." Here Curry's preaching seems designed to lead his hearers to something akin to one of the eucharistic prayers of confession in the Episcopal Church: "We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world you have created. We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf"[20]. Curry even offers a word of absolution that points to Jesus's unselfish, sacrificial death for others.

While developing his call to confession, Curry narrates Black suffering as cruciform (#6). He cites *Martin Luther King, Jr.* Then, in a powerful homiletical run, he names many who have died because of racist violence: "It happened to Breonna Taylor on March 13th in Kentucky. It happened to Ahmaud Arbury on February 23rd in Georgia. And need I mention Melissa Ventura, Paul Castaway, Sandra Bland, Eric Gardner, Michael Brown, Traveon Martin?" Curry calls this America's long running "painful path." With this litany of grief, Curry names what might also be called an American *via dolorosa* imposed by white supremacy onto Black people for centuries.

Bracketing all of this is an *anemnetic* narration of Christ's suffering of injustice and violence (#2). After connecting Jesus's life with Black experience, Curry preaches, "There is a part of us that just wants to throw up our hands and in the words of the Psalm cry 'How long? How long, O Lord? How long?'" The goal here is not merely lament or memory. Curry intends for his hearers to feel Christ standing in solidarity with those in suffering. Curry's preaching echoes James Cone's "redemptive faith" in "God's presence in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed […] that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair"[21]. Curry wants to evoke a Black liberation theology that empowers perseverance with faith and hope.

Finally, Curry supports his call for cruciform embodiment (#5) with the use of the spiritual, "There is a Balm in Gilead". Curry cites this song five times throughout his preaching (#3). On the one hand, the spiritual serves as a kind of *Sanctus* that leads the people to celebrate and to invite God's power and might at work in the world. "There really is a balm" Curry says, for self-centeredness and systemic racism and violence. On the other hand, Curry uses the spiritual as an *Epiclesis* – a way of invoking the Spirit to fall upon the gifts of God and upon the people (#4). This is especially clear near the end of his sermon where Curry twice cites another verse of the spiritual that says, "Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my life's in vain, but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again." Curry takes this as testimony to how the Spirit can transform us in our weakness to embody God's love and to work, sacrifice, and protest for God's way of life in this world.

Following Curry's sermon, on Monday, June 1, 2020, police and National Guard troops dressed in riot gear tear gassed peaceful protestors in front of St. John's Episcopal Church

[20] Enriching Our Worship 1. Morning and Evening Prayer, The Great Litany, The Holy Eucharist. New York 1998, 19.
[21] *James* Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree. Maryknoll, NY 2011, 150.

in Washington, D.C. so that President Trump could use the church for an unauthorized photo opportunity.[22] As Bishop of the Diocese of Washington, *Mariann Budde* immediately released a statement denouncing these actions.[23] Six days later she preached on Trinity Sunday at the Washington National Cathedral.

Budde's sermon holds together the call to confession of white supremacy (#1) with a celebration of Black Americans working for freedom and truth. She calls out individualism in American religious culture. She corrects the church's attempts to avoid building the kingdom of God on earth, directly names white supremacy as sin, and puts the onus on white members of the congregation to "fix our race problem."

Throughout her sermon, Budde engages in an *anemnetic* celebration (#2) of the gift of Black Americans who both name the problem of racism and work for truth and freedom. Budde begins by citing an article from the "1619 Project" by *Nikole Hannah-Jones*[24] who argues that without Black Americans fighting for democracy there would be no real democracy in the United States. Budde also quotes *Otis Moss III*, who diagnoses America as suffering from viral COVID-19 and racist Confederate-1619[25]. She credits Kelly Brown Douglas for her insights on how crisis can be a *kairos* moment of opportunity.[26] And, Budde thanks her Black colleagues and friends for calling white Christians to both do the work and to breathe in the Spirit of God.

By focusing on *kairos,* Budde preaches about a different understanding of liturgical time (#3). It is a "crucible" time, a testing time, a challenging time. But, it is also a hopeful time of possibility.[27] As Budde preaches, "we might actually have an opportunity to change some things in our country and in our world that have been crying out for change for a very long time – think of that possibility. What if the time is now?" Here Budde plays with liturgical time to invite her congregation to embody (#5) the salvific transformation that God has worked in the past and seeks to work in this moment. She preaches, *"Kairos*

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[22] *Egan Millard*, Outraged Episcopal leaders condemn tear-gassing clergy, protesters for Trump photo op at Washington church, in: Episcopal News Service, June 2, 2020: https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/06/02/episcopal-leaders-express-outrage-condemn-tear-gassing-protesters-for-trump-photo-op-at-washington-church/.

[23] *Budde* said, "Let me be clear: The president just used a Bible, the most sacred text of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and one of the churches of my diocese without permission as a backdrop for a message antithetical to the teachings of Jesus and everything that our churches stand for" (Jeanine Santucci, "'I am outraged': DC bishop denounces Trump's church visit after police clear protesters with tear gas," in: USA Today, July 2, 2020: https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/06/01/mariann-edgar-budde-slams-trump-church-visit-after-george-floyd-protesters-tear-gassed/5313842002/).

[24] *Nikole Hannah-Jones*, Our founding ideals of liberty and equality were false when they were written. Black Americans fought to make them true. Without this struggle, America would have no democracy at all, in: The New York Times Magazine, August 18, 2019, 14–22: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.

[25] *Otis Moss III*, The Cross and the Lynching Tree. A Requiem for Ahmaud Arbery, sermon held at: Trinity Church, Chicago, IL, May 17, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6985UG0Z3k.

[26] *Kelly Brown Douglas/Liz Theoharis*, In this Kairos Time, Will We Embody Church?, in: Sojourners, March 26, 2020, https://sojo.net/articles/kairos-time-will-we-embody-church.

[27] Here she follows *Kelly Brown Douglas* and *Liz Theoharis* who write: As South African clergy and theologians said in their 1985 Kairos Document, this is for us a, "moment of grace and opportunity, [a] time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action" (ibid).

rises from chaos that is pregnant with the presence and the possibilities of God. So, dare with me, those of you who are people of faith …"

Still, Budde does not entirely ignore the fact that it is Trinity Sunday. Rather, she uses this liturgical occasion to remember and celebrate the liberating work of the Trinity as the resource for her diocese to draw from in their work for justice. Budde gives thanks that God's initial and ongoing work in creation establishes the essential good nature of humans and the world. She remembers God's response to human brokenness in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus[28] (#6). And she celebrates how the Spirit is being poured out in this moment (#4). For example, as her sermon closes Budde proclaims:

> The creator God is busy creating a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus is right where we'd expect him to be, and the Spirit is blowing through our land. The only question you and I need to answer is 'Where are we?' As for us in this house, in this cathedral, in this diocese, we will serve our creating, liberating, life-giving God. And we will show up after the cameras have gone, after the crowds disperse. We will continue the hard work of justice. Amen.

With this homiletical move Budde mirrors movements within the Eucharistic liturgy, from Father to Son to Spirit. She even echoes the commissioning prayer after communion that asks God to "send us out to do the work …"[29]. In these ways, Budde draws upon the Eucharist not as a liturgical illustration or a spiritual symbol, but as the theological narrative for confronting this moment where dual pandemics require honest confession, genuine community, and the transforming grace of God.

5. Summary and Questions for Further Reflection

I began this paper by underscoring the important interconnection of preaching, Eucharist, and the work of the people. An astute reader may have noticed, however, that even while largely agreeing, Hilkert and LaRue argue from different sides of the coin. Hilkert, a Catholic scholar, emphasizes the importance of the Eucharist over preaching. LaRue, an African American homiletician, argues that preaching must be more eloquent than communion. This difference in emphasis points to an ongoing debate about what element of liturgy should be valued more by the Church.

One of the interesting things that this study of sermons suggests is that, at least at the Washington National Cathedral, the experience of the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism has blurred the hard line between preaching and Eucharistic celebration. The preaching of Mariann Budde and Michael Curry demonstrate how

> **the rite of confession** can help the preacher name their own grief and the congregation's pain in the face of COVID-19. Confession can also be used in preaching to confront racism and systems of white supremacy.

[28] *Budde* preaches, "For Christians, Jesus is God's definitive response to the brokenness of it all and the brokenness in us – God's being in human form, walking with us, suffering, dying alongside us, forgiving us for all the ways we fall short of the goodness for which we were born, and through his example and in his power teaching us how to love."
[29] The Book of Common Prayer, New York 1978, 366.

Budde and Curry show how the preacher can employ ***anamnesis*** to encourage resolve, acceptance, and even hope in the face of viral outbreaks. And, the preacher can use remembrance to describe God's victory over violent injustice in Christ and through the witness of Black Americans.

Budde and Curry illustrate how **liturgy and music** can offer the preacher a means of leading the people into a transformative and spiritual experience of God even when they cannot worship together, physically. And, they show how the preacher can use songs, prayers, and liturgical time as resources for naming the presence of God, empowering God's people for the work of liberation.

Budde and Curry show how **invoking the Spirit** can enable preachers to transform suffering by revealing God's loving presence. And, they point to ways the preacher can use *epiclesis* to highlight God pouring out grace that makes it possible to change even a painful 400-year long path of racism.

Budde and Curry show how the preacher can **call for embodiment** of love during a pandemic – one that is fed spiritually by Christ's serenity during Holy Week or by the persistence of the women at the tomb. And, they show that involvement in protest and the hard work of justice can feed the bodies of preacher and people with the Living Word.

Budde and Curry invite the preacher to **lift up Christ broken and raised** at Easter and in our pandemic-fueled gardens of Gethsemane. And, they proclaim the body of Christ broken in Black suffering. The blood of Christ poured out to heal individual and systemic brokenness.

In short, the preaching of Budde and Curry shows that the preacher can use elements of the Eucharist in preaching because the Eucharist preaches. I have focused on only six markers of eucharistic preaching, but many more could be named in Methodist and Episcopal traditions, not to mention the insights and opportunities other Christian traditions would add.

In this time of COVID-19, which has killed, sickened, and physically separated so many people, and in this time of heightened awareness of the pandemic of racism in America, which has led a nation to grapple with its history and long for change, we could use a homiletic that does more than wait for the Eucharist or ignore the Eucharist completely. This moment calls for a word that brings together a body of people to love and serve God's way in the world, a word that gives thanks for God's redeeming work in the past, one that offers God's real and saving presence today, and one that invokes God's outpouring of the Spirit for a resurrected and transformed future. To make it plain: especially in this time of dual pandemic we could use a little more Eucharist in our preaching.

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Protest as Preaching

The Pneumatic Proclamation of Black Lives Matter[1]

Edgar "Trey" Clark III

Abstract —— *This article explores some of the recent protests in support of Black Lives Matter from a homiletical perspective. Specifically, the author argues that these protests reflect a non-traditional form of pneumatic or Spirit-inspired proclamation that can enrich the church's preaching in a time of crisis. The article is arranged into three sections. First, a pneumatological framing of proclamation is proffered in order to interpret protest as a mode of Spirit-inspired preaching. Second, drawing on the author's experience as a participant-observer in select protests in Southern California, three snapshots of proclamation at protests are offered. The article concludes by suggesting that the pneumatic proclamation of recent protests challenges the church in the United States to hold together three key dialectical tensions in its proclamation: lament and celebration, particularity and universality, and word and deed.*

1. Introduction

During the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, significant attention has been given to the reconfiguration of Christian proclamation. However, in the United States, in the midst of the coronavirus, the persistent pandemic of racism has served as a catalyst for an often-overlooked form of proclamation: protest.[2] While protests have a long history of erupting in times of crisis throughout the globe, in May 2020, the United States and the world at large saw an unprecedented rise in protests against racial injustice in support of the Black Lives Matter, or BLM, movement. These demonstrations were part of a larger story of struggling for freedom, liberation, and justice – a story that includes the revolutionary

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[1] This article is based upon a paper presented at the online Societas Homiletica conference "Words in a Time of Crisis," August 2020. Special thanks to Jerusha Matsen Neal for the phrase "protest as preaching."

[2] There is a substantial body of literature that reflects on preaching as an act of protest or prophetic resistance. See, for example, *Walter Brueggemann*, The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word, Minneapolis (MN) 2012; *Charles L. Campbell*, The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching, Louisville (KY) 2002; *Kenyatta R. Gilbert*, A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights, Waco (TX) 2016; *Kate Hanch*, "How Can These Things Be?": Zilpha Elaw's Foolish Ministry, in: Liturgy, 35: 1, (2020), 32–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2020.1701901; *Kimberly P. Johnson*, The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit, Lanham (MD) 2017; and *Andrew Wymer*, Punching Nazis? Preaching as Anti-Fascist Resistance, in International Journal of Homiletics, 3, (2018), 81–98: https://ul.qucosa.de/landing-page/?tx_dlf[id]=https%3A%2F%2Ful.qucosa.de%2Fapi%2Fqucosa%253A31549%2Fmets. However, to my knowledge, there is little explicit homiletical reflection on protest outside the ecclesial context as a form of proclamation. For one notable exception, see *Donyelle C. McCray*, The Censored Pulpit. Julian of Norwich as Preacher, Lanham (MD) 2019, 115–117. McCray offers an insightful interpretation of the preaching of the performance artist Reverend Billy. See also *Jill Lane*, Reverend Billy: Preaching, Protest, and Postindustrial Flânerie, in: The Drama Review, 46, 1, (Spring 2002), 66–84: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1146945?seq=1.

activism of *Nat Turner*, *Sojourner Truth*, and *Harriet Tubman* in the nineteenth century as well as the defiant declarations of *Fannie Lou Hamer*, *Martin Luther King Jr.*, and *Angela Davis* in the twentieth century. In "When They Call You a Terrorist", *Patrisse Khan-Cullors*, one of the co-founders of the BLM movement, identifies Black Lives Matter as part of the "progeny" of the many known and unknown Black freedom fighters that have come before.[3] Whether calling for reimagining public safety generally or the prosecution of violent cops[4] specifically, BLM and numerous other decentralized groups have emerged over the last several years in response to the ongoing death-dealing structures that perpetuate the dehumanization of Black and brown people around the world. As BLM's official website states, their mission is to "eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes."[5] In the aftermath of the violence that led to the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others, global protests surged to stand against police brutality and anti-Black racism.[6]

In this article, I tentatively explore some of these recent protests[7] in support of Black Lives Matter from a homiletical perspective. I should note that I am not officially part of the BLM movement. Neither do I claim to represent the diverse beliefs and perspectives within the movement. However, following George Floyd's murder, like many others around the world, I participated weekly in various peaceful protests and direct actions against police brutality and anti-Black racism. I also helped organize several small protests in my community in Southern California. As a Christian, an ordained minister, and an African American male, my participation was both an act of embodied lament and an attempt to publicly love my neighbor and myself by calling for justice that reflects the character of God. In the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, for me, these multiracial

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[3] *Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandela*, When They Call You a Terrorist. A Black Lives Matter Memoir, New York (NY) 2017, 186. For an intriguing intellectual history of the Black Lives Matter movement, see *Christopher J. LeBron*, The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea, New York (NY) 2017. For an incisive historical and social analysis of the Black Lives Matter movement, see *Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor*, From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation, Chicago (IL) 2016.

[4] For an intriguing study of how racial trauma affects the bodies of police (along with ethnic minorities and people of European descent), see *Resmaa Menakem*, My Grandmother's Hands. Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies, Las Vegas (NV) 2017. Even if a person advocates a move toward defunding the police in order to invest in alternative forms of community services, I think it is still important to acknowledge the ways in which racial trauma affects those in law enforcement and the unique responsibility they have to deal with that trauma.

[5] "About," *Black Lives Matter*. Accessed 20 October 2020. https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/. Those who accuse BLM of inciting riots and violence fail to understand their mission. Often the rioting that occurs in the context of protests (which is rare in my experience) is from outside influences disrupting peaceful attempts at protesting. Even still, it is important to understand the pain, grief, and anger experienced by those who riot to be heard.

[6] To be clear, while I am convinced of the pervasiveness of racism in the US in general and in US policing in particular, I do not believe that *every* police shooting involving a Black woman or man should be understood in the same way. At least from my perspective, some more clearly evidence the ways that systemic injustice and racial bias contribute to the unjust death of Black folk. I think this is the case, for example, with *Breonna Taylor* and *George Floyd*.

[7] At the time of this writing, BLM protests have significantly subsided in the United States. However, I have deep respect for the many leaders and supporters of BLM who have advocated for systemic justice long before it was fashionable to do so and who continue the work of transforming communities and institutions around the world now that protests have abated. They have inspired me to more faithfully leverage my time, gifts, and resources to advocate for justice in ways that fit my call.

protests were a site for unexpected encounters with God. This article is my provisional attempt to make homiletical sense of these encounters.

Specifically, I argue that the recent protests reflect a non-traditional form of pneumatic or Spirit-inspired proclamation that can enrich the church’s preaching in a time of crisis. The article is arranged into three sections. First, I provide a pneumatological framing of proclamation in order to interpret protest as a mode of Spirit-inspired preaching. Second, drawing on my experience as a participant-observer in select protests, I offer three snapshots of proclamation at protests. Finally, I suggest that the pneumatic proclamation of recent protests challenges the church in the United States to hold together three key dialectical tensions in its proclamation.

2. Protest as a Mode of Preaching

While the word protest derives from the Latin word “protestari” (which means to testify or witness publicly),[8] protesting is not typically thought of as a form of preaching or proclamation. Following *O.C. Edwards* and other scholars, many students and teachers of preaching have tended to define a sermon as “a speech delivered in a Christian assembly for worship by an authorized person that applies some point of doctrine, usually drawn from a biblical passage, to the lives of the members of the congregation with the purpose of moving them by the use of narrative analogy and other rhetorical devices to accept that application and to act on the basis of it.”[9] This definition seems to assume that preaching involves formal authorization, Scriptural interpretation, and a traditional liturgical context. However, *Donyelle McCray* helpfully suggests that we need a broader understanding of the sermonic than Edwards proffers. In her dissertation, published as “The Censored Pulpit”, McCray explores the English anchorite, theologian, and mystic Julian of Norwich as a preacher.[10] In doing so, she argues that proclamation be defined as a “wide range of speech-acts intended to declare the saving work of God in Jesus Christ.”[11] McCray’s definition of proclamation pushes us to recognize non-traditional forms of sermonizing. She suggests that atypical forms of sermonizing include the distribution of tracts, graffiti art, nuns marching for justice, and more. For McCray, what binds these acts of proclamation together is an intent to announce God’s saving work in Christ.

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[8] The Latin word *protestari* is formed by the prefix *pro* (forth, before, publicly) and the verb *testari* (to testify, witness). The word *testari* itself is derived from the noun *testis* (witness).

[9] *O.C. Edwards*, A History of Preaching, Nashville (TN) 2003, 3f. For a narrow but helpful examination of the primary Greek terms that constitute preaching in the New Testament, see *Jonathan I. Griffiths*, Preaching in the New Testament. An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study, Downer’s Grove (IL) 2017, 17–40.

[10] See *Donyelle McCray*, “The Censored Pulpit: Julian of Norwich as Preacher.” ThD diss., Duke Divinity School, 2014. See also *McCray*, The Censored Pulpit. For the sake of this article, I am focusing on McCray’s dissertation instead of her book because it explicitly offers a fluid definition of preaching that resonates deeply with my work. However, I should note that her book and other work continues to implicitly understand preaching as a wide-range of speech-acts even though she does not use this exact definition. For McCray’s definition of preaching in her book, see *McCray*, The Censored Pulpit, 3f.

[11] *McCray*, The Censored Pulpit (note 10), xvi. Drawing on *Judith Butler*’s Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative, New York (NY) 1997, *McCray* understands a speech-act as a bodily act that is not reducible to speech and as an act of speaking that is not reducible to the body. In other words, a speech-act is embodied communication that exceeds both body and speech. Of course, the term speech-act was introduced in the seminal work of *J. L. Austin*, How to Do Things with Words, ed. J. O. Urmson Eastford [1962] 2018. For *Austin*, a speech-act is an utterance that not only says something but does something.

While I am intrigued by McCray’s definition, from my perspective, its Christological framing eclipses some of the proclamation of recent protests. Though self-identified Christians participate in these protests and sometimes play a key role in leading them, in general, I have found that the protests represent people from a plethora of spiritual backgrounds and beliefs.[12] In short, participants are usually not intending to declare the saving work of God in Jesus Christ. And yet I have found the protests a profound place of divine encounter. Thus, I advance a more expansive framing of proclamation to illuminate the revelatory sermonizing happening on the streets.

Drawing on McCray’s work in conversation with theologian Oscar García-Johnson, I propose that a pneumatological understanding of proclamation may be more useful in detecting forms of sermonizing outside of traditional liturgical contexts—though, of course, the Spirit cannot be divorced from the person and work of Christ. In an essay entitled “In Search of Indigenous Pneumatologies in the Americas,” *Oscar García-Johnson* sets forth a Spirit-led theology of general revelation in order to recognize and affirm God’s revelatory work among indigenous peoples before the conquest in the Americas.[13] In other words, he avers that while Christ may not have been explicitly named in indigenous beliefs and practices before the arrival of Christian missionaries, traces or glimpses of the Spirit’s revelation can be seen in the ancestral traditions of native cultures. For him, this revelation signifies the liberating work of the Spirit outside the prescribed domains of orthodoxy that have been legitimated by white Western hegemonic power. Similarly, I suggest that the recent protests in support of Black Lives Matter, though not explicitly Christian, are a context in which the liberating revelation of the Spirit of Christ is taking place.

While some may scoff at the idea of God speaking through recent protests, *Robert Johnston* reminds us in his book “God’s Wider Presence” that there is a biblical precedent for God speaking to the people of God in unexpected ways.[14] In Genesis 14, God chooses to use the high priest of Salem, Melchizedek, to commission Abram. In Numbers 22, God uses the Transjordan diviner Balaam to bless Israel. In John 4, we encounter God choosing to use the joyful proclamation of a Samaritan woman in a Jewish community. And surely, we cannot overlook the scandal of God’s revelation in the itinerant ministry of the poor, unhoused, first-century rabbi we know as Jesus. God is free. God speaks however God chooses to speak. Thus, I offer a fluid definition of proclamation to explore protests as a mode of preaching. *I propose that preaching or proclamation can refer to a range of Spirit-inspired speech-acts[15] that bear witness to God’s truth, goodness, and beauty inside and outside of the traditional pulpit.*

[12] Future research might consider the varied forms of proclamation by Christians at BLM related protests. This would yield insight into some creative expressions of theologizing outside of ecclesial contexts that maintain a Christocentric focus.

[13] *Oscar García-Johnson*, In Search of Indigenous Pneumatologies in the Americas, in: Gene L. Green/Stephen T. Pardue/K.K. Yeo (eds.), The Spirit over the Earth. Pneumatology in the Majority World, Grand Rapids (MI) 2016. For a more extensive treatment of this proposal, see *García-Johnson*’s newest book Spirit Outside the Gate: Decolonial Pneumatologies of the American Global South, Downer’s Grove (IL) 2019.

[14] *Robert K. Johnston*, God’s Wider Presence. Reconsidering General Revelation. Grand Rapids (MI) 2014. For what follows, see also *García-Johnson* (note 13), 153.

[15] I follow *McCray*’s understanding of speech-acts based on the work of *Butler* described above.

To be clear, I affirm the unique character of God's revelation in Scripture, the church, and the person of Christ. Neither do I want to diminish the important call of those set apart to preach in traditional liturgies. And I believe all proclamation must be measured against the Scriptures and the wisdom of the church. Nevertheless, I argue for the existence of Spirit-inspired speech-acts that transgress the boundaries of traditional proclamation. From my viewpoint, the proclamation of the recent protests against police brutality and anti-Black racism is one such example.

3. Proclaiming the Gospel of Black Lives Matter

With this in mind, I would like to consider different ways this proclamation occurs at protests. But first, let me briefly highlight what I see as the central theological message that is proclaimed in the BLM related protests. In a widely read account of the origins of the movement, *Alicia Garza*, one of the co-founders of BLM, states: "[Black Lives Matter] is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression."[16] In theological parlance, we might say that Black Lives Matter is a theological statement that affirms that Black people are made in the *imago Dei*, the image of God.[17] It is a statement that unflinchingly challenges the death-dealing systems that disproportionately dehumanize and destroy Black and brown bodies around the world. To echo activist and artist Andre Henry, the statement might even be considered the "gospel" message of the movement.[18] Now, to be clear, I am not seeking to fully equate the gospel of BLM with the gospel of Jesus Christ.[19] Moreover, I know some strongly disagree with the assumptions, proposals, and practices of BLM. Still, if the Spirit is "the Spirit of life," can the proclamation of Black Lives Matter be anything but a pneumatological pronouncement?[20] Hence, I argue that the proclamation of the gospel of Black Lives Matter is congruent with the life-affirming and liberating work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It proclaims God's justice. For, as *Luke Powery* says, "[t]hrough preaching, the Spirit fights for life and seeks to resist any form of power that would aim to destroy humanity."[21]

Based on my participant-observation at protests, I now offer snapshots of this kind of preaching by focusing on three forms of proclamation: chants, community storytelling, and embodied celebration. Of course, there are many other forms of proclamation that

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[16] *Alicia Garza*, A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, in: The Feminist Wire, https://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/ [accessed 20 October 2020].

[17] Of course, this is not to say that all people are not made in the image of God. However, the statement Black Lives Matter acknowledges the historic, systematic ways Black lives have not been valued. For an engaging study of the BLM and All Lives Matter social movement, see *Amanda Nell Edgar/Andre E. Johnson*, The Struggle over Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter, Lanham (MD) 2018.

[18] *Andre Henry*, When Christians won't acknowledge racism, protest becomes church, in: Religion News Service: https://religionnews.com/2020/06/08/when-christians-wont-acknowledge-racism-protest-becomes-church/ [accessed 20 October 2020].

[19] At the risk of confusion, I use the phrase "gospel" loosely. As Paul writes in Galatians, in a sense, there is only one gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Gal 1:6–9).

[20] Cf. *Jürgen Moltmann*, The Spirit of Life. A Universal Affirmation (trans. Margaret Kohl), Minneapolis (MN) 2001.

[21] *Luke A. Powery*, Spirit-Driven Theology of Preaching, in: *Sally A. Brown/Luke A. Powery*, Ways of the Word. Learning to Preach for Your Time and Place, Minneapolis (MN) 2016, 36.

could be explored.[22] Additionally, it would be worthwhile to give concrete attention to how these acts of proclamation reveal alternative expressions of preaching authority that shape and are shaped by the physical space in which they take place. While I will not be able to explore these important issues, my observations may prove a starting point for further research by others. To begin, one of the most obvious ways I've seen the gospel of Black Lives Matter proclaimed is through chants. By chants, I mean the repetition of a phrase or series of sentences. Chants are often proclaimed by multiracial groups marching in public spaces with signs that reinforce the message spoken. I experienced powerful chants at a protest organized the weekend following *George Floyd*'s murder. It was Pentecost weekend, and I couldn't help but sense the Spirit's voice through the diverse voices around me proclaiming the dignity, value, and worth of Black people. At one point, the crowd began declaring: "Shout down Babylon, Black people are the bomb. We ready. Yeah. We ready."[23] Echoing the title of Rastafarian Bob Marley's 1999 album, "Chant Down Babylon," I heard the chant as a liberating theological proclamation denouncing the American empire as Babylon, announcing unapologetically the beauty of Black life, and pronouncing a readiness to defy any opposition that says otherwise. Other popular chants reflected what Evans Crawford termed "participant proclamation."[24] In one, people are invited to lament victims of anti-Black violence when someone declares "Say his name" or "Say her name." For example, a person will declare "Say her name" and the group may respond *Breonna Taylor*, *Rekia Boyd*, or one of the myriad other Black women killed by police. I have sensed the Spirit profoundly present in these collective proclamations – grieving and groaning for new creation.

A second way I've seen the gospel of Black Lives Matter proclaimed is through community storytelling that provides space for individuals to share their experiences of anti-Black racism. Stories or testimonies have long been recognized as a form of Christian proclamation – at least stories told by the right person, in the right place, and from the right perspective. However, the stories I hear at protests often transgress the politics of respectability that govern many evangelical pulpits. One such story was shared at a protest in Long Beach, California on the 51st anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, demonstrations that served as a catalyst for LGBTQ+ rights. The speaker was Ms. *Fatima Shabazz*,[25] a self-identified African American transwoman.[26] Hearing Ms. Shabazz share

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[22] For example, one could study the planned and impromptu speeches that often are delivered at BLM related protests. Moreover, some protests that I attended had a fairly elaborate "liturgy" that included silence, singing, speaking, and calls to action. Much more research could be done to consider the liturgical proclamation of BLM related protest.

[23] I should note that often the wording of this chant is different than what I heard. Typically, it says "Chant down Babylon" instead of "Shout down Babylon."

[24] *Evans Crawford* with *Thomas H. Troeger*, The Hum. Call and Response in African American Preaching, Nashville (TN) 1995, 38.

[25] I am grateful for Ms. *Fatima Shabazz*'s permission to use her name in this paper. To learn more about her advocacy and artistry, see https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/artists/7859/fatima-malika-shabazz. It would be worthwhile to offer more extensive analysis of her spoken word poetry as a kind of sermonizing outside the pulpit.

[26] I realize that there are a variety of Christian perspectives on transgender identity and the LGBTQ+ community more broadly. For a conversative "evangelical" Christian perspective on transgender identity, see *Mark A. Yarhouse*, Understanding Gender Dysphoria. Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture, Downer's Grove (IL) 2015. For a "mainline" Christian perspective on transgender identity from a transgender Christian, see *Austen Harke*, Transforming. The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians,

her story of perseverance in the midst of a society that all-too-often seeks to demean and destroy transgender people,[27] I began to reflect on *Saidiya Hartman*'s "Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments". Hartman's award-winning work explores the ingenuity, agency, and boldness of young Black queer women and radicals in the early twentieth century. For her, the "waywardness" of these social outsiders represents "an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive."[28]

I find myself thinking of Ms. Shabazz as a kind of "wayward" witness – a bold, creative, unapologetic transgressive preacher imagining alternative worlds that are possible in a world in which she was never meant to survive.[29] Standing before hundreds of people, Ms. Shabazz shared about the relentless violence, abuse, and pain she has experienced at the hands of the police as an African American transwoman. She also spoke about her refusal to submit to bullying, threats, or other dehumanizing treatment. At one point, with her body and her voice, she loudly proclaimed: "We're here, and we're queer!" While listening to Ms. Shabazz speak, I caught a glimpse of the liberating Spirit fighting for life in her body, resisting any form of power that would destroy human life, any religious leader that would treat her as if she is not fully made in the image of God. She preached a bold and disruptive sermon.

A final way I've seen the gospel of Black Lives Matter proclaimed is through embodied celebration. This was seen vividly at a protest I attended in downtown Huntington Beach, California. A little less than 100 of us marched from a local park down to the pier. When the march ended, we listened to several people share experiences of brutal encounters with the police and heard calls for action. And, then, much to my surprise one of the African American women leading the gathering called us to celebrate. She said: "This is a long fight we are in. Even as we struggle for justice, we must take time to celebrate." Before I knew it, music was playing and people were singing what some have called the anthem of the BLM movement, rapper *Kendrick Lamar*'s "Alright." The group also did several dances connected to popular rap songs: the Stanky Legg, the Superman, the Dougie. Self-conscious about doing the dances, I confess I observed on the sideline trying not to get caught in anybody's photos. However, they soon were doing the Cupid Shuffle, and I couldn't resist. As I joined, I found myself caught up in what I can only describe as the ecstasy of the Spirit. Our dancing did not in any way seek to dismiss or minimize the pain of our protest. But it did refuse to let the pain have the last word. In the words of

Louisville (KY) 2018. Whatever one's theological stance on transgender folx and the LGBTQ+ community, I am seeking to present Ms. *Fatima Shabazz* as one whose proclamation reminds us of the dignity and value of all people as made in the image of God.

[27] The disproportionate mistreatment and violence that transgender people face is well-documented. For information and resources on the transgender community, see https://transequality.org/ and https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender.

[28] *Saidiya Hartman*, Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals, New York (NY) 2019, 228, emphasis original.

[29] When I shared with Ms. *Shabazz* that I experienced her words as a form of preaching, she expressed appreciation, especially since her grandfather was a minister in the American South.

theologian Willie Jennings, the joyous celebration was a refusal to surrender to "the forces of despair."[30] Every move, every smile, every laugh was congruent with the creed of the Spirit of life—Black Lives Matter.

4. Learning from Preaching outside the Pulpit

While the proclamation of recent protests raises all kinds of challenges that might reorient the life and practices of the church in the world, in this final section, I focus on some its challenges to the practice of preaching. Specifically, I raise the question: what can we learn from the pneumatic proclamation of recent protests that might inform preaching in our pulpits in a time of crisis? In the midst of all their diverse expressions and aims, I suggest the protests challenge the church in the United States to hold together three important dialectical tensions in its proclamation: lament and celebration, particularity and universality, and word and deed.[31]

First, what might it look like to hold together both lament and celebration in our liturgies of proclamation? I imagine it may start with recognizing that both can be strategies of survival in different ways and times. This is seen in the way the protests welcome stories of lament and practice celebration. Additionally, as *Luke Powery* helpfully notes, we must not forget that when we create space for lament and celebration, we are actually making space to attend to the Spirit.[32]

Second, the church has much to learn from the recent protests about holding together the particular and the universal in its proclamation. While maintaining solidarity with indigenous peoples and the Latinx community, most protests I attended foregrounded and named Black lives in their proclamation. In the words of Lisa Thompson, there is a "claiming of body and personhood by naming" the particularity of Black pain.[33] Preachers of the scandalous particularity of the gospel must be particular in our proclamation, for our hope hinges on particularity. The God of Israel is made known in Jesus, and it is through this sun-kissed Savior that the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh. Our preaching cannot speak to the universal unless it honors the particular.

Third and finally, the proclamation of recent protests invites the church to hold together word and deed in its proclamation. I did not have space in this article to elaborate on how I saw protests do this, but, along with chants and speeches, some protests provided opportunities to register to vote, connect with advocacy groups, and write officials to lobby against racist policies. While individuals and churches have unique calls, it is urgent that the church recovers a view of proclamation that is not divorced from Spirit-energized justice in the world. In the words of *Gayle Fisher-Stewart* in "Preaching Black Lives Matter", "Human beings have created this system of dehumanization and

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[30] *Willie Jennings*, Theology of Joy. Willie James Jennings with Miroslav Volf, YouTube Video, 20:28, Yale Center for Faith and Culture. September 19, 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fKD4Msh3rE.

[31] It would be worthwhile to explore the similarities and differences between how these three dialectical tensions appear in the proclamation of BLM versus Black preaching traditions. I am grateful to *David Stark* for this insight.

[32] *Luke A. Powery*, Spirit Speech. Lament and Celebration in Preaching, Nashville (TN) 2010.

[33] *Lisa Thompson*, Holy Interruptions, YouTube Video. 42:47. Fuller Studio. November 6, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWD8qtmtSLk.

injustice and it will take human beings to dismantle it."[34] I believe God will ultimately renew all creation. But might it be that the proclamation of recent protests is a divine summons to join the Spirit in this urgent work now? If so, may we heed the words of the Book of Revelation: "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 3:22, NRSV).

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[34] *Gayle Fisher-Stewart*, Introduction. Is There a Word from the Lord?, in: idem (ed.), Preaching Black Lives (Matter), New York 2020, 17.