

Foreword

In this Advent 2022 issue, we mark a major milestone of the *Journal for Preachers*. After some forty-five years of editing the *Journal*, the Reverend Dr. T. Erskine Clarke is officially retiring. This is truly a remarkable, even cataclysmic event, for some of us have been reading this quarterly resource since its very beginnings. We have encountered in its pages the preaching and theology and social analysis of some of the most thoughtful and courageous scholars and preachers out there—people like Walter Brueggemann and Barbara Brown Taylor and William J. Barber II and Tom Long and Sam Wells and Anna Carter Florence and Agnes Norfleet and on and on. And, like a symphony conductor at the root of it all, we have also encountered the steady and purposeful leadership of Erskine Clarke.

My good friend Mark Ramsey and I are honored, in the wake of Erskine's retirement, to be invited to pick up the reins of the *Journal*. I will be serving as the Editor of the *Journal for Preachers*. I am delighted to be sharing the leadership of the *Journal* with Mark, who, going forward, will be the Publisher of the *Journal for Preachers*. Mark is a Presbyterian pastor who spent many years in parish ministry and currently serves as Executive Director of The Ministry Collaborative/Macedonian Ministry. I, too, am a Presbyterian pastor who also served in the parish, and, following those ministries, I have just retired from twenty years of serving as President of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. We both look forward to walking in the footsteps of Erskine Clarke in the days and years ahead.

Across his impressive career, Erskine has distinguished himself as an American Religious History professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, from which, as a Seminary student, he received his Master of Divinity degree in 1966. He went on to Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond where he received his Ph.D. From there he went to the University of Basel for further study, and, across most of the rest of his career, he served on Columbia Seminary's faculty. In those years, he lectured and consulted in major universities and divinity schools all over the world.

As a historian, Erskine has focused much of his scholarly energy on the nature of religion and slavery in the American South. His books include such titles as *Wrestlin' Jacob, Our Southern Zion, By the Rivers of Water*, and the stunning account of southern slavery, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*—a book which won the coveted Bancroft Prize.

And yet, astonishingly, Erskine has at the same time dedicated years of his academic energy in the craft of preaching and the heart for shepherding reflection on the homiletical craft. We who love and cultivate and benefit from thoughtful preaching are indeed his debtors. Erskine, I believe, has given the greatest measure of his career to encouraging such thoughtful preaching because, quite simply, he loves the Church. This truth has been asserted over and over again by those who know Erskine well and are

indebted to his ongoing commitment to the Church's preaching. Ahead, in fact, in this Advent issue are grateful tributes from a number of pastors who have been longterm readers of the *Journal* and devoted friends of Erskine.

Professor William Yoo, a fellow American Church historian who was one of Erskine's colleagues, offers a special tribute to Erskine. One of our Associate Editors, Betsy Swetenberg, Pastor of the Northridge Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, offers a sermon on approaches to Advent preaching, as does Joseph J. Clifford, pastor of Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Amina McIntyre—a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal tradition—is sharing both an Advent sermon, "Birthing the Impossible," and a short play that is based on Luke 1 and is entitled "THE CALL, or OF COURSE I MIND." Scott Black Johnston, Pastor of New York City's Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, is sharing the sermon "Faith: A Letter to Oliver," which is a chapter in a book of sermons soon to be published. Bishop William H. Willimon of the United Methodist Church reflects in the Protagonist Corner on current travails in his communion—a piece entitled "What the Heck Is Going On in the United Methodist Church?" Noted Old Testament professor and preacher Walter Brueggemann offers an article entitled "On Breaking the Silence." And homiletician Thomas G. Long shares his perspective on soon-to-be-released *A Preaching Primer: Theology, Scripture and Sermon Preparation* by Leah D. Schade, Jerry Sumney, and Emily Askew (published by Rowman and Littlefield).

This issue promises to instruct, inspire, and maybe even entertain! Give thanks, then, for the creativity displayed in this Advent 2022 edition. And, by all means, give thanks as well for the dedication and example of our dear friend and mentor, Thomas Erskine Clarke.

Faithfully,
Ted Wardlaw, Editor