

Editor's Foreword

Now as we await the arrival of Advent, we look forward to the beginning of another Christian year. I suspect that many of us are particularly grateful to be turning the page on this waning year and expressing hope for a new beginning. We think of the terrors that assailed the world across this past year: the frightening weather events, the ugly rhetoric that divided us, the turmoil within nations, the fear that stalked our streets, and somewhere in our hearts we are yearning to sing once more: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

It is our hope that the *Journal for Preachers* will provide inspiration for all of you as you look forward to the promises of Advent and the seasons that follow it. In the pages that follow, you will be inspired by thoughtful sermons, articles, "rules of the road" as we approach the preaching task, and even a contemporary Christmas story.

Mark Ramsey and I begin in this issue by sharing the guiding principles of sermon writing voiced by a host of contemporary colleagues engaged in the homiletical task. We hope you will be moved by their wisdom and experience.

The Reverend Carla Jones Brown, Pastor and Head of Staff of the Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, brings a sermon that announces that "we are in Advent—again." That being the case, she calls us to "remember the past, see the present, and envision and wait for the future." She invites us "to enter Advent seasons not with the dread of repeating what has been but with the excitement of what can be." Even in the wilderness, she encourages us to search for its mile markers and to wait both with expectancy and within community. Moreover, she urges us to remember that the Good News is more the journey than the destination.

You will also be edified by The Reverend Charles Foster Johnson, Pastor of the Bread Fellowship in Fort Worth, Texas. His sermon, "Advent Hope In a Time of Terror," focuses on the new world that Jesus creates—a world that overcomes our fearful cynicism and replaces it with discipleship. "This means something quite simple," says Johnson. "We will say the things that Jesus said and we will do the things that Jesus did. In short, we will quit our previous regimen of saying and doing things before Jesus came along, and now go and say the things that Jesus said and did. This is a discipline, the pursuit of which makes us a disciple."

In this issue of *Journal for Preachers*, I wish to warmly greet the Reverend Lewis Galloway—a first-time contributor to *JP*. In his piece "The Terror of Advent," he offers a comprehensive and beautifully literary introduction to the grand themes of Advent. An exceptional biblical scholar, preacher, and lover of poetry, Galloway presents the many voices of the Advent season and provides an inspiring start for all of us who are preparing for preaching at the beginning of a new liturgical year.

A particularly wise and confessional contribution for this edition of *Journal for Preachers* comes to us, not from a preacher, but from a deeply sensitive physician,

Dr. Luke Farmer. The title of his piece is “What the Physician Wants the Pastor to Know.” With the promise of Advent on his mind, Farmer asks us preachers to provide “help to live into the Advent hope that even where we cannot heal the body, Jesus, the Great Physician, can still make all patients whole.” His reflections about his craft are brave, honest, and humble—and he thinks like a theologian. Speaking for himself and his fellow physicians, he says, “We want you to help us reclaim the joy and promise of Christ’s coming in our daily work. We need to be reminded that the Christian faith at its core is about right relationship, with God and one another.” So may it be!

Adrienne Mixon, a pastor’s wife (Adam Mixon) and a counselor at Better Days Counseling in Birmingham, Alabama, offers an encouraging word to pastors, “Wounded Souldiers.” You may think at first that she has misspelled “soldiers,” but think again. She is referring to spiritual leaders who tend to the needs of the souls in their congregations. She urges pastors—“souldiers”—to provide care for their own souls in order to more effectively care for their parishioners; she encourages their own self-help, because doing so “is called being a wise steward.” I commend this very helpful word of encouragement to all pastors who selflessly care for their people—and who sometimes forget to care for themselves.

Max Sherman is a model and mentor to countless people of all ages. An educator, a political strategist, a state senator, a university president, a longterm dean of the LBJ School of Public Affairs, and a Presbyterian elder, Max Sherman has walked the corridors of state houses, courthouses, university campuses, hospitals, homes, and churches. He has been a huge influence on many people, including myself. “I believe,” says Sherman, “that the gospel itself is politically charged. My philosophy about preaching on political issues is that one must begin, not with the political issue, but with the gospel . . . If I am faithful to the gospel, it will inevitably lead to particular political issues relevant to the day.” What wisdom!

Near the end of this Advent issue of *Journal for Preachers*, we are grateful to welcome Eric Wall—a lover of music of all sorts, a choral director, a seminary professor, an organist and pianist, and one acquainted with a number of other musical instruments. His presence in this journal—a journal that so focuses on preachers and preaching—will remind us that Advent is not just spoken but is also sung. In the cavernous Montreat Auditorium in Montreat, North Carolina, in the summertime, thousands of choristers of all ages come to sing; in the middle of it all, there you will find him. Sometimes he’s at the organ or piano keyboard; others times he’s beating on a drum or playing cymbals. He runs the gamut from ancient plainsong to some new piece that got composed last week. Wherever he is and whatever he’s doing, he is fundamentally a musician, a director, and a teacher. You will appreciate his contribution to this issue of *JP!*

Here in our Advent 2023 issue, we end with a story—*Christmas Dinner at Mary’s Place*. The author is a dear friend of mine. The Reverend Jon Maxwell Walton is

a graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York, and served several churches as a senior pastor: the Setauket Presbyterian Church in Setauket, New York, the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware, and the First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York. Everywhere Walton has served, he has been admired for his preaching, leadership, social justice work, and pastoral care. Now, in retirement, he is preaching, writing, and telling stories. Enjoy this one!

Faithfully,
Ted Wardlaw, Editor