



Editor's Foreword

In this Lenten 2024 issue of *Journal for Preachers*, I hope you will be inspired and encouraged by the insights you will encounter. For instance, Sarah Are Speed, an associate pastor at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, reminds us in her sermon of the ongoing presence of Jesus—even on days when finding that presence may be hard—hard, even, for preachers, hard even for John the Baptist. Sarah lifts up, with profound imagery, a hopeful note in the midst of all about life that often knocks us down. Against all the evidence that often crowds around us, Sarah boldly encourages the church and its people to join a God who has never stopped proclaiming good news to the poor and sight to the blind.

Emily McGinley, the lead pastor at City Church in San Francisco, shares for us a sermon, *Invested Liberation*, drawn from Matthew 18:21-35. This sermon, while based upon scripture which might at first suggest a seminar on debt and investment, is ultimately a fervent picture of radical generosity. “We are a forgiven people,” McGinley says, “and so we must act like it.” Elsewhere, she lifts up the gracious power of gratitude, compassion, grace, and forgiveness, and encourages her parishioners (and us readers) to be set loose for the work of liberation in the world.

David Feltman, invoking Matthew 11, focuses on congregations in rural Iowa, who, in the words of Matthew 11:28, are weary and carrying heavy burdens. “When I preach Matthew 11:28-30, I will give attention to the yoke.” He goes on: “It is a shared yoke, Christ is in the lead position. It is a fitted yoke, tailor-made for each Christian and preacher. And in this article we need a broader understanding of yoke, we are in this together.” This essay will be useful to any pastor-preacher struggling through days that are bleak. Pastor Feltman concludes with this word of grace: “Be sure of God’s support, and wait quietly until the true rest from God fills your being.”

Amy Valdez Barker, a pastor in Atlanta, offers a delightful and comprehensive picture of a number of moods and complex relationships with Jesus. I believe that her essay is good grist for the mill for pastors in search of differing and perhaps conflicting voices of Jesus; this essayist encourages such a search. She challenges pastors to “present Jesus in all of his complexity, messiness, and love.”

Nancy Benson-Nicol, an associate pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, is a dynamic and creative preacher. From the pulpit of Fourth Church, Nancy and her pastoral colleagues regularly address an array of people in search of a word from God that is twinned with a living picture of faithful community. In this sermon from Romans 8:26-39, Paul stresses that a sense of community does not protect us from suffering, but even in the midst of such suffering, God’s presence surrounds us. Hence, in this sermon, Nancy urges courage and hope. “Let us, with courage,” she proclaims, “acknowledge our weaknesses, both individually and collectively. Let us be built into communities both transformed and transformational, through the power of Christ that mends and re-members us. Let us as the church hold space for the

lonely, the forgotten, and the neglected, for, in so doing, we more than likely hold space for ourselves.”

Sarah Travis’s treatment of Mark 5:25-34 is a timely and thoughtful meditation on the profundity of trauma. The woman who had suffered her ailment for twelve years summoned the courage to tug on Jesus’s garment in the midst of a crowd, and she was immediately and thoroughly healed. This text offers an insight into other contemporary experiences of trauma. “I would argue,” writes Sarah, “that our entire culture is traumatized: by the pandemic, by political division, by racism, and by violence.” I would concur and would encourage preachers to make room for this text during Lent.

Hierald Osorto, a talented preacher and pastor of San Pablo-St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, offers a sermon he preached on Ash Wednesday in 2020. Ash Wednesday is one of the simplest, and yet dramatic, services in the Christian year. It begins the season of Lent, and sets a particularly stark tone of quiet self-reflection. We welcome Hierald and offer our gratitude for modeling an ecumenical service on this profound occasion.

We also welcome Matt Fitzgerald, pastor of Saint Paul’s United Church of Christ, Chicago to this edition of the *Journal*, and offer our appreciation for his poetry selections. Likewise, we welcome Jessica Padgett. Pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee, Jessica is an associate editor at the *Journal* and is a highly regarded preacher, pastor, and leader. Thank you, Jessica, for this fine sermon and for your commitment to the work of the *Journal for Preachers*.

We welcome once again Dr. Paul Hooker to *JP*. An Old Testament scholar, a parish pastor across many years of his ministry, a poet, and a professor and mentor to seminary students, Paul critiques the recent book, *Tethered to an Appalachian Curse*, by David Brown Howell. And finally, *Journal for Preachers* welcomes once again our dear friend and the *Journal*’s editor emeritus, Dr. Walter Brueggemann. He has been a frequent contributor to this journal, and it is always a pleasure to publish his wise words!

Faithfully,
Ted Wardlaw, Editor