

Carolyn B. Helsel. *Preaching about Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018. 132 pages. \$17.38.

In a divisive socio-political atmosphere in the United States, the resurgence of overt racism becomes more and more apparent. Despite its grievous effects on the lives of people of color, racism is a topic preachers avoid in their sermons. Preaching about racism to predominantly white congregations is an especially difficult task for white preachers. In her book, *Preaching about Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders*, Carolyn B. Helsel, assistant professor of homiletics at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, provides preachers with both a critical examination of racism and a practical guide for preaching about racism to white congregations.

This book comprises seven chapters. In chapter 1, Helsel lays a theoretical and theological basis for the book. She contends that preaching about racism to white Christians needs to begin from a place of gratitude, not shame or guilt (9). By integrating Paul Ricoeur's work on three forms of recognition with the concept of original sin and God's response to sin, Helsel offers an explanatory framework for how preaching on racism can move toward gratitude. Gratitude is not merely feeling thankful but it is a form of recognition that points us toward others. The recognition of racism, and the recognition of God's ongoing redemptive work in us despite our inability to completely free ourselves from racism, lead to a sense of gratitude that motivates us to preach on racism and invites us to keep engaging with this challenging issue.

In chapter 2, Helsel reveals how white preachers' and congregations' default interpretive lenses are blinded by racism. To overcome one's interpretive blindness, three forms of recognitions are necessary: the recognition of racism, the recognition of one's racial identity as white, and the recognition of ways to respond to racism through the practice of gratitude. Chapter 3 traces the shift of racial categories and the definition of racism over time. Not only do people have different definitions of racism, racism is also a concept that is constantly changing. Hence it requires ongoing conversation with others to define what it is (29). Although there is no clear-cut, single definition of what racism means, myths about racism hinder people from expanding their capacity to respond to racism; Helsel thus debunks ten common racism myths. In chapter 4, Helsel introduces racial identity development theory as a helpful framework to understand the process of fostering the formation of a positive white racial identity, and explicates its implications for preaching.

In chapter 5, Helsel examines how to preach biblically about racism. For this task, Helsel tackles Haddon Robinson's understanding of biblical preaching that identifies the Bible with the word of God itself and attempts to find a unilateral meaning of the text. She offers an alternative perspective of biblical preaching that acknowledges the multivocality of the biblical texts and attends to God's works in the present, responding to the current forms of oppression, including racism. In chapter 6, Helsel provides her own theological understanding of racism for preaching in relation to three Christian metaphors for sin, namely idolatry, estrangement, and bondage. Racism as idolatry elevates whiteness as a symbol of truth, virtue, and superiority, while treating people of color as invisible (73-74). The sin of racism as estrangement causes the loss of connection from God and other people, and harms our ability to relate to others across racial divides. The metaphor for the sin of racism as bondage shows the embodied nature of racism and its intractability (79). In response to each metaphor for sin, preachers are called proclaim hope through faith in Jesus Christ on the basis of the deep sense of gratitude. Chapter 7 offers a

practical guide for sermon preparation for preaching on racism, and how to engage beyond the church walls on the issue of racism.

Helsel deeply engages with the challenging topic of race and racism from diverse theoretical and theological perspectives, and writes about it in highly readable and compelling manner. Prophetic preaching about racism to white congregations often stimulates feelings of guilt and shame, and demoralizes people. However, Helsel reminds readers that at the heart of preaching on racism is a deep sense of gratitude for God's ongoing redemptive work in a broken, racist world. As a person of color who serves a white congregation, I found in this book many practical tools for preaching on racism. However, I also realize a missing part in her work. The power dynamic between a white congregation and a pastor who is a person of color is different from that between a white preacher and a white congregation. Although Helsel claims that "I write not only to other white Christian leaders, but to all faith leaders" (3), I suspect that her primary intended readers are white Christian leaders rather than the people of color. Nevertheless, this book is a much needed and valuable resource for both scholars and preachers.

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