

Sarah Travis. *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021. 126 pages. \$ 19.

Everyone has scars, though not all scars are visible. Some wounds run so deep that they cannot be easily perceived or healed. Traumatic experiences leave indelible scars on our body and soul. Preaching seeks to heal wounds by proclaiming the good news. However, the ongoing effects of trauma completely alter trauma survivors' ways of feeling, knowing, and perceiving reality so beautiful words from the pulpit often fail to reach them. In her homiletical theological response to trauma, Sarah Travis, who teaches preaching at Knox College, University of Toronto, proposes trauma-informed preaching by reexamining theological commonplaces and the practice of preaching through the lens of trauma.

Chapter 1 offers a sweeping review of trauma theory, a broad definition of trauma, and its effects in relation to the central elements for the practice of preaching. Travis describes traumatic experiences as "a kind of encounter with death" (16). These radical events shatter the world trauma victims know and reorganize the perception of the mind and their ways of engaging with self, others, and the world. Trauma survivors often experience the fragmentation of memory and have trouble with processing language and narrative. Due to intrusive memories of traumatic events, the past does not stay in the past but continues to intrude into the present and thus, they are unable to imagine the future. Trauma shatters their relationships with others as well as themselves, while traumatic experiences can also be opportunities for growth.

Chapter 2 uses trauma as a lens for critiquing and reexamining existing theological frameworks, including a theology of the gospel, in order to help preachers to adequately address trauma and hope for trauma survivors in preaching. Due to "the ongoingness of traumatic wounding," (39) trauma survivors often feel that they live in-between life and death. Life and death or grace and trouble intermingle in the experience of the in-betweenness of trauma (49). In the face of trauma, both death and resurrection are considered essential parts of gospel. It is necessary for preachers to remain in this in-between space and tell two stories simultaneously: "one of a resurrection that has overcome death, and one that testifies to the ongoingness of death even in the face of the resurrection" (54).

Chapter 3 considers the meaning and role of "witness" for trauma-informed preaching. A witness is the one who observes a particular event and is called upon to bear witness to what one has seen and heard on behalf of someone (57). Preachers are witnesses to stories of trauma and those of the resurrection at the same time. The good news emerges from this middle space between life and death, where the strict binaries of life and death become blurred, and multiple stories and perspectives are held together simultaneously (67). Only when preachers can hold both narratives of trauma and grace together in witnessing the reality of traumatic wounding's, then words from the pulpit may bring healing to those who are traumatized.

Chapter 4 examines the role of imagination in trauma-informed preaching. For recovery from trauma, the capacity to imagine new life is essential, while traumatic events debilitate trauma survivors' capacity for imagination and agency. The preacher as a midwife of the imagination helps the traumatized find a space in which they can imagine a new future even in the midst of trauma (80). The task of the preacher is to help people imagine a future and reestablish a directionality that moves toward hope, resilience, and recovery without denying the reality of the traumatic wounding. Preaching as healing discourse helps traumatized people integrate their fragmented memory of trauma into the larger story to create a sense of wholeness

and make meaning of their lives. The church can provide a safe environment for the traumatized person and narrative frameworks to reconnect fragments to make a meaningful whole.

Chapter 5 explores the roles of language and offers trauma-sensitive hermeneutics. By using trauma as a hermeneutical lens, Travis attends to traumatic realities such as violence and exile in sacred texts, how these traumatic events affect individuals and communities, and how the traumatized find their way to survival and resiliency (102). Travis proposes Bibliodrama and lament as useful hermeneutical methods. Bibliodrama, a form of role-playing, can be a communal practice to explore the unspoken reality of trauma in the lives of the biblical characters and uncover their feelings, emotions, or bodily senses. This bodily engagement with texts is an interpretive method for trauma survivors and can expand preachers' understanding of the text (105). Lament is a theological language that affirms God and the reality of human suffering simultaneously. Lament provides a space to remember and honor the pain and suffering of trauma survivors without ending in the abyss of despair because lament is also a language of faith.

We live in an age of trauma. We witness numerous traumatic events directly or indirectly. Trauma has been an important contextual and pastoral element for preaching. Travis invites preachers to remain and struggle in-between the space between life and death to proclaim the gospel for trauma survivors and all people of God. What I would like to know more about is how different types of trauma such as cultural trauma can be dealt and healed in preaching. For instance, the process of cultural trauma is different from that of individual trauma. While Travis acknowledges the different kinds of trauma, her homiletical proposal is a response primarily to individual trauma. This book offers timely and valuable insights for preachers who take the reality of trauma seriously but still believe that "there is a balm in Gilead" for the traumatized. Indeed, there is a balm for trauma survivors but it can be found only in the space between life and death. Travis provides an excellent map of this difficult and uncharted terrain of trauma for preachers and homileticians.

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