

African American Prophetic Preaching

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Fall 2008

Studio One, Chapel

Instructor: Debra J. Mumford

Email: dmumford@lpts.edu

Office: 203 Schlegel Hall

This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

During the decades of African/African American enslavement, biblical preaching was often used to justify and maintain the institution of slavery. African American prophetic preaching evolved from the experiences of enslaved Africans who chose to believe in a God of liberation – A God who loved them for who they were and who created them to be a free people.

Black rhetorical traditions will be delineated and identified through study of African American preachers and sermons from the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries. Unique characteristics such as call and response, celebration in preaching, and black hermeneutics will be explored. Each student will be required to preach one sermon using African American preaching traditions as a model.

By the end of the course (course objectives):

- 1) Students will understand how African American Preaching evolved out of the West-African North American slave trade
- 2) Students will learn and develop black hermeneutics
- 3) Students will understand the unique characteristics of black preaching such as call and response and celebration.
- 4) Students will understand and be able to employ rhetorical skills used in black preaching
- 5) Students will understand the relationship between preaching and culture
- 6) Students will learn to deliver a sermon in black preaching traditions

Required Text/Readings:

Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997.

Mitchell, Henry H. *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

All other readings will be posted on the Blackboard course site.

Class Meeting Dates

Monday, September 8

Monday, October 6

Monday, November 3
Monday, December 1

Assignments

1. Each student is required to attend every class session and actively participate in class discussions. (12 points)
2. Each student will place in the discussion board of Blackboard at least one discussion concern or question for each reading assigned during the semester by midnight on the day the assignment is due. Questions and concerns can represent issues raised by the author that need further clarification or issues not addressed by the author but which were raised by the reading in the mind of the reader. Students are encouraged to respond to the posting of other class members. Instructor will respond to postings on Tuesday of each week. (18 points)
3. Each student will submit one 7-10 page exegetical paper on a scripture passage listed on this syllabus. The passages chosen should be the same passages used to develop the sermons. Guidelines for the exegetical papers are provided in Tom Long's *The Witness of Preaching*. **Due November 3.** (20 points)
4. Each student will submit a transcript or outline of their sermon along with details about the preaching context, occasion, and hearers. **Due November 24.** (10 points)
5. Each student will also preach one 15-20 minute sermon. (40 points)
6. Each student is required to bring a video tape (VHS) on the days they preach to record sermons.

Scripture Passages for Exegetical Papers

Each student must choose one of the following scripture passages for exegetical papers. Texts chosen for exegesis are the same text students will use for their sermons.

Genesis 37:26-36 • **(Joseph)**

Exodus 14:21-31 • **(Crossing the Red Sea)**

Exodus 32:10 • **(The Golden Calf)**

2 Samuel 11:1-27 • **(David and Bathsheba)**

1 Kings 3:16-28 • **(Solomon and the Baby)**

Ezekiel 37:1-14 • **(Valley of Dry Bones)**

Luke 15:11-32 • **(Prodigal Son)**

Luke 19:1-10 • **(Jesus and Zaccheus)**

John 6:1-14 • **(Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand)**

Acts 9:1-18 • **(Conversion of Saul)**

Acts 16:25-40 • **(Paul and Silas in Jail)**

Ephesians 6:10-20 • **(The Whole Armor of God)**

September 8, 2008 – Class Meeting

Introduction to the course and students

What Is Black Preaching?

“The Search for Distinctiveness in Black Preaching” in

LaRue, Cleophus James. *The Heart of Black Preaching*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. pp. 9-29

Why Black Preaching?

Mitchell, Henry H. *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991. pp.11-16

September 15 - Reading

Mitchell, Henry H. *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991. pp. 23-38

“The Sun Do Move” by John Jasper
LaRue, Cleophus James. *The Heart of Black Preaching*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. pp. 131-137

“Introduction: The Power of Black Women Preachers” and “Julia Foote” in
Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998. pp. 1-9, 57-68

“Rising Above Adversity: The Struggle to Preach.” in
Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997. pp. 11-37

September 22, 2008 - Reading

African American Biblical Hermeneutics

“The Talking Book” 1-20
“The Poison Book” 21-40
“The Good Book” 41- 48
“Exile” 49-82

All above readings in

Callahan, Allen Dwight. *The Talking Book : African Americans and the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

“The ‘Joseph Story’ as Slave Narrative: On Genesis and Exodus as Prototypes for Early Black Anglophone Writing.” in
Wimbush, Vincent L., and Rosamond C. Rodman. *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. New York: Continuum, 2000. pp. 221-235

September 29 - Reading

African American Biblical Hermeneutics and the Civil Rights Movement

Vincent Harding. “The Anointed Ones: Hamer, King, and the Bible in the Southern Freedom Movement.” pp. 537-545

Keith D. Miller. "City Called Freedom: Biblical Metaphor in Spirituals, Gospel Lyrics, and the Civil Rights Movement." pp. 546-557.

Lynne Westfield. "Life-Giving Stories: The Bible in a Congregation." pp. 577-587

Cheryl J. Sanders "African Americans, the Bible, and Spiritual Formation." pp. 588-602.

All readings in

Wimbush, Vincent L., and Rosamond C. Rodman. *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. New York: Continuum, 2000.

October 6, 2008 – Class Meeting

Power in the Pulpit. "Explaining What the Text Means" 42-48
Sermon: "God Uses Weak People" 49-58

"Encountering the Text" 59-66
Sermon: "Encounters with Jesus from Dying to Life" 67-73

"Enabling the Word to Happen" 74-82
Sermon: "Are We For Real" 83-88

All readings in

LaRue, Cleophus James. *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Sermon Review

October 13, 2008 – Research and Study Week

October 20, 2008

"The Basic Dynamics of the African American Sermon" 114-127
LaRue, Cleophus James. *The Heart of Black Preaching*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Celebration

"Celebrative Design and Emotional Process" 1-18

"A Theology of Celebrative Preaching" 19-30

"The Dynamics of Celebration" 31-50

Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997. pp. 11-37

October 27, 2008

Thomas. "Designing for Celebration" pp. 51-83

"Guidelines for Celebration" pp. 84-106

Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997.

November 3, 2008 – Class Meeting

Exegetical Paper Due

Sermon Review

November 10, 2008

Mitchell. Celebration “Genres: General Guidelines” 79-85

“The Narrative” 87-100

Mitchell, Henry H. *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

November 17, 2008

LaRue

“The Character Sketch” 101-107

“The Group Study” 109-115

“Metaphors, Similes, and Analogs” 117-124

“The Inevitable Combinations” 125-136

Mitchell, Henry H. *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

November 24, 2008

Submit manuscript/outline of sermon

December 1, 2008

Sermon Presentations

Guidelines for the Exegetical Papers

Each student must submit a 7-10 page exegetical paper on a text listed on the syllabus. **The paper is due on Monday, November 3.** In *The Witness of Preaching*, Thomas Long presents a brief method of exegesis for preaching. Details about what is required in each section are contained in the reading. The reading is posted on the course website.

Section III of the paper should be approached from an African American perspective. How do experiences as an African American shape the way you “attend to this text?” Allow the readings for September 22nd and 29th and other personal, contextual experiences inform your view of the text here. The paper must include each of the following sections:

- I. Getting the Text in View
 - a. Selecting the text
 - b. Reconsider where the text begins and ends
 - c. Establish a reliable translation of the text
- II. Getting Introduced to the Text
 - a. Read the text for basic understanding
 - b. Place the text in its larger context
- III. Attending to the Text
 - a. Listen attentively to the text
- IV. Testing What is Heard in the Text
 - a. Explore the text historically
 - b. Explore the literary character of the text
 - c. Explore the text theologically (God in relation to humanity)
 - d. Check text in commentaries

- e. "Moving Toward the Sermon:" State the claim of the text upon the hearers and preacher

Grading Scale

End of semester grades will be conferred in accordance with the scale below:

100-97	A	84-81	B-
96-93	A-	80-78	C+
92-89	B+	77-75	C
88-85	B	74-71	C-

Mutual Respect

During class, each person is required to respect her/his classmates and the instructor by arriving to class on time, listening attentively to the thoughts and opinions of others, providing constructive feedback when appropriate , and turning off cell phones before class begins.

Late Policy

All assignments are to be by midnight on the day they are due. Assignments submitted after midnight on the due date will be considered late. Assignments submitted late will be penalized twenty-five percent (of the total possible points for the assignment) per day. All sermons will be preached on Monday, December 1. Except in the event of a family/medical emergency or catastrophe, failure to preach on the assigned date is subject to a grade of "zero" for the sermon.

Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities.

Plagiarism

It is expected that students will perform all written and oral assignments with complete academic integrity by only submitting papers and preaching/submitting sermons with their own original thoughts and ideas. When using thoughts and idea of others, students are to properly attribute credit in footnotes. Any instances of plagiarism discovered will be reported to the Dean's office. Two reports of plagiarism constitute grounds for dismissal from LPTS.

Sermon Evaluation (Total of 40 Points)

<p>Reach/Trim (4 points) Amount of material need to make the sermon understandable to hearers. This generally applies to narrative sermons. Before launching into the heart of the sermon, the preacher generally provides background information that hearers need to have more information about the characters/situation being referred to. For example, in order to understand the significance of Paul’s conversion to apostleship in Acts 9, the hearers need to know that Paul persecuted followers of Christ in the past.</p>	
<p>Body Language (4 points) Effective use of hands, facial expressions, and body.</p>	
<p>Introduction (4 points) Arouses interest of the listeners Related to the main point</p>	
<p>Transitions (4 points) Are transitions from one part of the sermon to the next smooth and easy for hearers to follow Introduction to the main body Between parts of the main body Main body to the conclusion</p>	
<p>Rate of speech/Fluctuation of tone (4 points) Does preacher vary the rate of speech? Does the preacher fluctuate the tone of voice? Does the preacher use pause effectively?</p>	
<p>Language (4 points) Uses language that lay people can understand Sermon given color and life by descriptive speech</p>	
<p>Application (4 points) How is main theme of sermon relevant to lives of hearers? Use concrete examples of how the main theme of sermon makes a difference to the listeners</p>	
<p>Sermon Structure (4 points) Sermon is easy for listeners to follow from beginning to end</p>	
<p>Conclusions (4points) Leaves the listeners with a strong impression of the main idea of the sermon Does not simply “rehash” or “summarize” the theme</p>	
<p>Theme (4 points) There is one theme only and it is easy for listeners to follow</p>	

Bibliography

- Blount, Brian K. *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh : New Testament Ethics in an African American Context*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- Gates, Henry Louis. *America Behind the Color Line: Dialogues with African Americans*. New York: Warner Books, 2004.
- Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
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- _____. *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
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