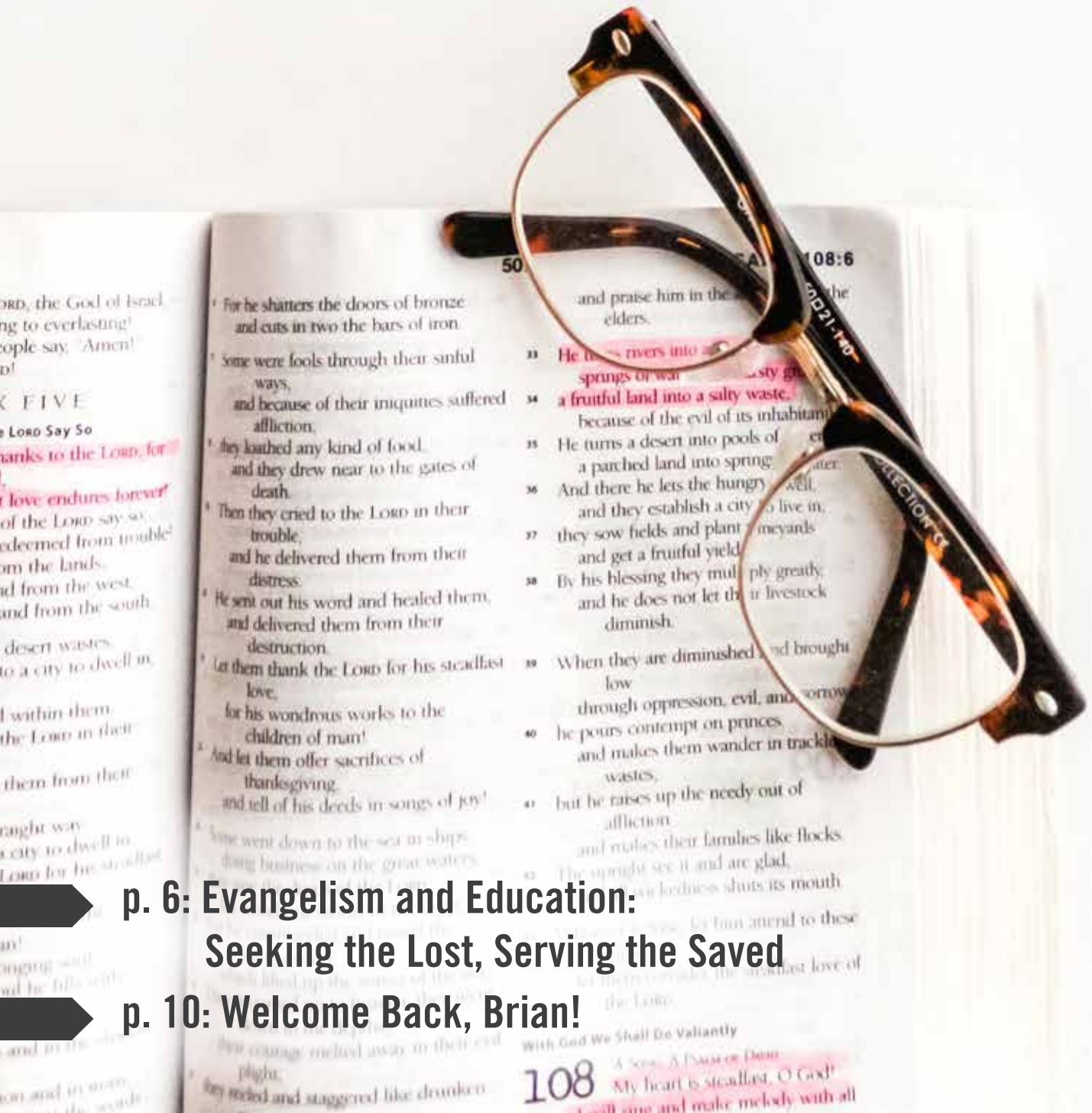


the messenger

Mid-America Reformed Seminary

p. 6: What in the World Makes a “Good” Sermon?

December 2019 | Volume 38 Number 2



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108 My heart is steadfast, O God!
I will sing and make melody with all

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

“THE CANONS OF DORT AND MISSIONS”



“The lazy-bones of our orthodox churches cry, ‘God will do His own work’; and then they look out for the softest pillow they can find, and put it under their heads, and say, ‘The eternal purposes will be carried out: God will be glorified.’”
Charles Spurgeon

Donald MacGavran, the dean of the “church growth” movement in the latter part of the twentieth century, often argued that the Reformation confessions lacked a missional focus. In his estimation, the confessions tended to emphasize the preservation of an established church. The church’s calling to go into the world in order to disciple the nations was muted at best, absent at worst.

In my recent series of articles on the Canons of Dort, I have had occasion to reflect upon the question of their implications for the church’s missionary calling. Are the Canons of Dort liable to the charge of being insufficiently focused upon the church’s mission in the world? By focusing upon the work of the Triune God in the salvation of sinners—the Father who mercifully elects in Christ before the foundation of the world, the Son whom the Father sends to make atonement for the sins of His people, and the Holy Spirit who effectually calls believers into union with Christ by the ministry of the gospel Word—could the Canons be guilty of failing to emphasize the church’s responsibility in proclaiming the joyful message of the gospel to the nations? This is a question that has to be honestly confronted. And, as the quote above from Spurgeon suggests, there is certainly anecdotal evidence that some Reformed believers have drawn the wrong conclusion from the Canons’ emphasis upon God’s sovereign and gracious initiative in saving His own. We can scarcely deny that we sometimes are found among those “lazy-bones” who say that, because salvation is God’s work, we will leave to Him the task of doing what only He can do!

Though the question whether Canons properly stress the church’s responsibility in missions is a legitimate one, there are two points that I would make by way of reply.

The first, and most obvious point, is that the Canons were written to address the unbiblical teachings of Arminius and his followers, the Remonstrants. Because the Arminian party taught that the salvation of sinners is ultimately grounded upon their free (indeterminate) choice to believe and to persevere in believing, the Canons rightly insist that salvation is the work of the Triune God from beginning to end. The church’s mission is ultimately the triune God’s mission (*missio Dei*). The “God of our salvation” is a Missionary God: the Father who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world; the Son who entered the world to make atonement for our sins; and the Holy Spirit who draws us into fellowship with the Father through the Word of the gospel. This is the great truth that the Canons properly defend in the face of the Arminian challenge. The mission of the church is in every sense God’s mission, not ours.

However, there is a second point that also needs to be made. According to the Canons, God’s mission is carried out in time through the ministry of the church. Ordinarily, God’s mission is effected through the means of grace that He has appointed. For this reason, the Canons begin by stressing the church’s task to proclaim the joyful gospel message to the whole world. Because God will not be thwarted in His saving purpose, the church may carry out the work of gospel proclamation with utmost confidence that all those for whom Christ shed His blood will be saved. Furthermore, the Canons stress that the joyful message of the gospel must be preached indiscriminately to all the nations and peoples of the earth. Through the sincere and serious call of the gospel, the church should compassionately seek the salvation of all those to whom the gospel is proclaimed. And as the church does so, she may confidently rely upon and pray for the work of Christ’s missionary Spirit, who alone is able to open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, and soften the hearts of those who are at enmity with God.

In short, the Canons have tremendous implications for the missionary calling of the church. Gospel proclamation that is born out of the teaching of the Canons will resound with the joyful message of the gospel. But it also proceeds from the settled conviction that God will unflinchingly cause such proclamation to accomplish His saving purpose. Rather than falling prey to a kind of evangelistic “legalism” (we can save ourselves and others, if only we try harder and do more), the church’s mission will be undergirded and emboldened by the gospel promise that God will have His house filled with men and women from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Luke 14:23; Rev. 5:9).

One of our tasks as a seminary is to remind our students of these missiological implications of the church’s confessions, including the Canons of Dort.

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema,
President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to The Messenger. Thanks for stopping in! We work hard to arrange a collection of content each issue that we think you'll find informative, interesting, and useful. This issue does not disappoint! Were you surprised to see a cover story exploring what a "good sermon" looks like? I mean, come on, we're a seminary! Shouldn't we have this figured out by now? Shouldn't the primary reason we exist remove the need to talk about the makeup of a good sermon? Well, don't panic. We do have a good grasp of what this looks like. Turn to page 6 to see what I'm talking about. We're also really excited to welcome back Brian Blummer, class of 2011, as our new Director of Enrollment Management. Brian brings with him his lovely family, and a wealth of knowledge in recruitment and retention through a collection of life and vocation experiences. You'll be introduced to him on page 10. Alright, enough here. Turn the page, and enjoy!



Michael Deckinga
Vice President of Advancement

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Editor

Michael Deckinga, Vice-President of Advancement

Contributing Writers

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, President
Michael Deckinga
Dr. J. Mark Beach
Dr. Marcus Mininger
Rev. Mark Vander Hart
Jared Luttjeboer
Rev. Nick Smith

Layout and Design

Rachel Luttjeboer

Our Mission

Mid-America Reformed Seminary seeks to serve Christ and His church by assisting in the formation and preparation of servants for the Kingdom of God. Our primary purpose is to train men for the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ. Guided by this focus, we are also committed to providing solid theological training for others among God's people whose life calling may be enhanced by theological education.

Website

www.midamerica.edu

Address

Mid-America Reformed Seminary
229 Seminary Dr.
Dyer, IN 46311

Phone:

219-854-2400

DEVELOPMENT REPORT: PROCRASTINATORS UNITE! TOMORROW.

Again! I've done it again! The deadline for articles to be submitted to the editor (me) is tomorrow, and I'm only just beginning this article today! Why do I do this? Why do I wait? It is bothersome, and leads to a stressful situation – one that could be easily avoided. Somewhere I saw a t-shirt that says "Procrastinators Unite Tomorrow!" I wear a size Large, if that interests anyone.

Waiting too long can lead to missed opportunities. Hitting the snooze button on your alarm may make you miss your train and cause your commute to be horrific. Starting dinner too late could lead to some tired and crabby kiddos by the end of the night. Not dropping that birthday card in the mail today might mean it won't reach your mom in time – or you might forget entirely and have to edit and send her an old Mother's Day card you never gave her previously. That last example sounds really specific. I wonder why?

Sometimes waiting can be a good thing. We don't want to run around being impulsive all the time. Prayerfully considering that new job opportunity will help you make your decision more clear on which direction to go. A vacant church ought to be patient while searching for a new pastor, all along seeking the Lord's guidance during the process. A prospective seminary student needs to spend time discerning the Lord's will and talking with trusted influencers in their lives to decide if they are really being called to train for the ministry.

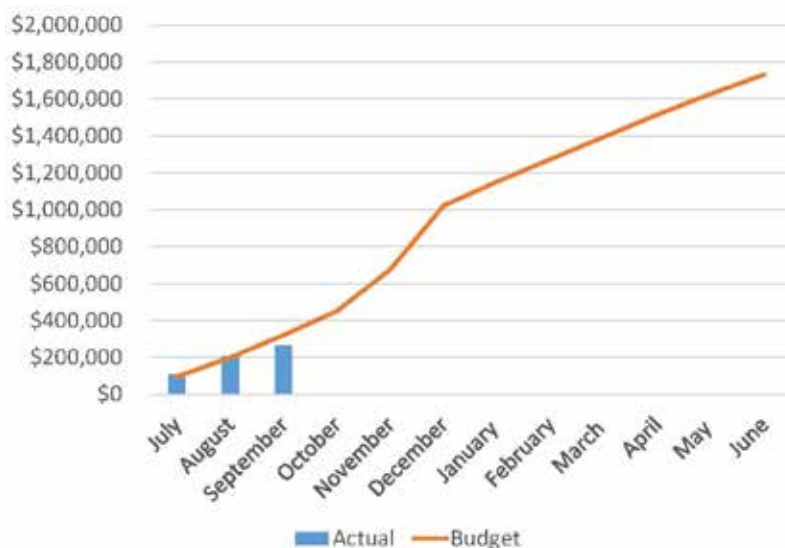
We are just weeks away from the beginning of another new year. You will have heard financial appeals from many organizations – Christian or otherwise – and you'll have some decisions to make about where to steward your resources. Since the Lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the decisions we make regarding charitable contributions are significant, and should be made prayerfully and thoughtfully.

Consider with me the significance of a gift to Mid-America Reformed Seminary. You provide us with the funds necessary to sustain this institution – one that is principally concerned with the academic, practical, and spiritual formation of a future leader in Christ's church. Your gift keeps tuition affordable, so our students can serve Christ after graduation, not their debt load. Your support compensates gifted pastor-professors and skilled administrators who labor to advance the Lord's kingdom every day.

December giving represents nearly 20% of our annual budget. That is a significant number – nearly \$300,000! If you have been partnered with us for a while now, you're not surprised at this need. If you haven't yet participated in our work, now is a great time to start. As you can tell from the graph above, budgeted revenue has already begun to pull away from our actual contribution numbers. Given the printing and distribution delays of this magazine, the gap may be even more significant by the time you read this.

Please prayerfully consider how you could help us – a one-time contribution, or a recurring monthly gift. It is our prayer that as you wait on the Lord's direction on how to steward the resources He's entrusted to you, that you will be led to partner with the Seminary by the end of the year in a significant way.

Michael Deckinga,
Vice-President of Advancement



BOARD REPORT

The Board of Trustees convened on Thursday afternoon, October 3, and acknowledged newly elected members Mr. John Boekestyn from St. Catharines, Ontario, Mr. Jeff Huizenga from Grant Park, Illinois, and Rev. Ed Marcusse from Lansing, Illinois. The Board also welcomed Rev. Lou Slagter, appointed to complete the term of Rev. James Folkerts who took a call to the missions field in Uganda. The Board returned Rev. James Sawtelle as President, Rev. Paul Murphy as Vice-President, Rev. Don Johnson as Secretary, and Rev. Harry Zekveld as Vice-All. Mr. Bryan Holstrom was elected Treasurer.

The Board considered a report from the Executive Committee which included a recommendation to add a missions training component to the Seminary curriculum. This recommendation was adopted, and a committee was established to determine the necessary steps to implement the program.

The Long-Range Planning Committee brought a recommendation for improvement of the Seminary's Ministerial Apprenticeship Program (MAP). The Board approved program enhancements in the areas of pastoral care and counseling, church administration, evangelism, and practice preaching, designed to give students more "hands-on" experience in these subjects. The Board also approved some enhancements to the way MAP effectiveness is evaluated.

In other news, the Board heard a report from an ad hoc committee established to consider the effectiveness of online distance education (ODE). The committee reported that while the Seminary can make better use of ODE, it concluded that the best preparation for the ministry is delivered in an on-campus environment. The board did agree that greater ODE flexibility may be warranted with the MTS degree.

Finally, representatives of the accounting firm hired by the Board to conduct a financial audit reported the results of its findings. The Board minutes note that the Seminary received "a clean report: the highest recommendation possible."

The Board is scheduled to meet again on May 7-8, 2020 in conjunction with Mid-America's graduation exercises.

Keith LeMahieu



New Board members: Rev. Lou Slagter, Rev. Ed Marcusse, and Mr. John Boekestyn.

EVENING CLASS: THE FORMATION AND BASIS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

This fall Dr. Marcus Mininger taught an evening course surveying how the New Testament was originally formed and why it should be received as canonical.

Recent critics often claim that the idea of canon was foreign to Jesus and the apostles and was only invented later by the church. Because of this, the course surveyed the history of how the church originally came to agree on the contents of the New Testament. There it becomes clear that formal agreement about the canon took several centuries to reach, and the reasons some church fathers gave in support of this agreement are not always persuasive.

Yet Scripture's own testimony is our actual foundation. The New Testament testifies how Jesus, the apostles, and others gave new revelation from God to his people, which was to be received on par with the Old Testament and form the exclusive foundation for the church's existence (Eph 2:20). Then they also produced a specific, unique set of documents that committed the content of this new revelation to permanent written form as an enduring rule for the church even after the apostles were no longer present (2 Thess 2:15; 2 Pet 1:15). The church did not invent the canon, then. Instead, the canon's existence and authority are established by the self-authenticating testimony of God's own Word itself.

Dr. Marcus Mininger



EVANGELISM AND EDUCATION: SEEKING THE LOST, SERVING THE SAVED

While our full-time faculty serve us ably, at times, learning opportunities for our students are led by other individuals – pastor-scholars who would ordinarily be serving in a local congregation, or at a like-minded institution. This fall, we have enjoyed the fellowship of two Adjunct Faculty members: Dr. Eric Watkins, and Rev. Brian Allred, who shared their expertise in their respective fields – expertise that has been obtained not only through study, but through pastoral experience of their own.

Dr. Eric Watkins, an OPC minister in St. Augustine, Florida, helped shed light on the importance of Evangelism in the context of Reformed Churches. Earning his PhD in Holland, Dr. Watkins appreciates the study of evangelism, and believes that the academics here at Mid-America – a place that “defends the truth as they ought, being eager to see the church face the challenges of planting and pastoring churches in what is becoming more and more a post-Christian culture” – allows for a robust study of the biblical theology of evangelism. He has taught homiletics courses here as well.

Rev. Brian Allred (class of 2007) grew up in Huntington Indiana, and now calls Yorktown Indiana home, where he serves as a minister in the PCA. Rev. Allred instructed our students on the importance of church education and catechesis. With a Bachelor’s degree in secondary education, and a teaching record in the local church going back 23 years, Rev. Allred understands the “biblical and theological basis of implementing an optimal education ministry.” Pastors being “equipped to oversee and share in the ministry of teaching” is an essential aspect of the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Mid-America Reformed Seminary is thankful for these brothers and their desire to see the kingdom of our Lord advanced through evangelism and education, and for their dedication to the work of our institution.

Michael Deckinga



Top: Rev. Brian Allred;
Bottom: Dr. Eric Watkins

ROUND TABLE SQUARED AWAY

After rounding up the troops, we congregate in the unofficial recording room – the Faculty Lounge – and assemble our respective gear for a two-hour audio campaign. In our jumble of equipment, picture if you will the cords coming out of laptops and headphones, some connecting to the centerpiece of our gathering, the Blue Yeti microphone. Books and papers, Rev. Andrew Compton’s “countdown” cards (to let participants know when to wrap up), and squeaky office chairs paint a picture of disorder.

And yet, that painting dissolves as soon as the discussion begins. The power button has been hit, the recording clock begins to tick, and the collective genius of our participating faculty brings a sense of order as a Round Table Podcast is being produced. They know what they’re doing, and it all flows together.

It seems that you are receiving it well! Numbers from our Sermon Audio page are quite encouraging to say the least. I guess we’ll have to start launching episodes once a week!

Seriously though, it’s under consideration.

Ultimately, it has been a joy of mine to record these conversations. You’ve heard our professors discuss justification, systematic theology, preaching, and the Puritans, and soon you’ll be hearing about evangelism and church outreach. If there are any topics you’d like to hear, feel free to email jluttjeboer@midamerica.edu.

Jared Luttjeboer



WHAT IN THE WORLD MAKES A “GOOD” SERMON?

DR. J. MARK BEACH

Ask someone: “What is a good sermon?” or “What do you count as ‘good’ preaching?” and you’re likely to get an array of answers, as unrelated to one another as a poodle and a hamster. Sure, both are pets; both are, well, mammals; and both are loved by their owners—but beyond that, they do not have much in common.

What churchgoers regard to be good sermons or good preaching can be much like that. One pastor’s sermon versus another’s (on the same passage) may vary widely. Both are “from the Bible.” Both are well-liked (or perhaps disliked) by their respective parishioners; and certainly both are expositions (or attempted expositions) of a biblical text. But beyond that, they might not have too much in common.

Deciding what is a good sermon or what is good preaching is not likely to find immediate agreement in most church circles. There are so many factors in play that what one person regards as a fantastic sermon another considers a flop. What should we say about that? Is it all a matter of taste?

No, it isn’t! But we have to admit that this is a difficult question. It is an issue that every discerning parishioner cares about, every elder must consider when he hears complaints or compliments about the pastor’s sermons, and that preachers themselves wrestle with Sunday to Sunday.

So, what makes a sermon “good”? What in the world is “good” preaching? To answer such questions requires that we apply the right criteria to corral a correct answer.

Let’s start with exposition of a biblical text—getting the text right.

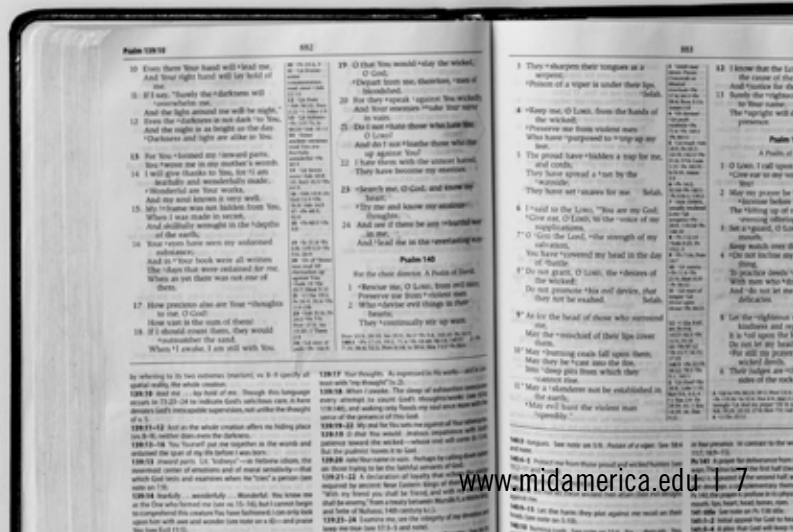
Getting It Right

Correct exegesis of the biblical text is, obviously, essential to a good sermon. Good preaching starts with “getting it right.” A misunderstood passage is a sermon that is off-the-dime from the start. Yet, even these sorts of sermons,

the wrongly interpreted kind, often say many scripturally valid things and serve up theological truth. The undiscerning are perhaps unable to discern that the pastor’s explanation of the text is off target, that he has “missed the point” of the passage, or that he is majoring in a minor matter while ignoring the major issue. Yet, his oratory was splendid; his theological orthodoxy was intact; and his sensitivity to how biblical truth applies to us, the gathered parishioners, is commendable. Such a sermon is used by God to bless people in spite of its exegetical failure—the sermon was rescued by being, nonetheless, biblically true and theologically lined up. But is that a good sermon? Not really. Is that good preaching? No, it commands some attention but we don’t need a steady diet of such proclamation.

Correct exegesis is too complicated a subject (too long and involved) to treat here, but suffice it to say that it involves an understanding of what the text is saying, in the context of its immediate neighboring storyline or message, and that too within the context of the wider biblical narrative itself—that is, where we are along the timeline of the history of redemption. What is more, it discerns the gospel, always, within that context. A failure here, a failure to discern the gospel’s application, relative to a given biblical text must disqualify a sermon as Christian preaching. Here’s why.

If the gospel is not discerned in a sermon, the pew is unlikely to (and the lost will never) discern it. Good sermons and



good preaching preach Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:24). This is critical. Without this, sermons become something else. They will point in one of two directions (yet they come down to the same thing). On the one side is the sermonic pep-talk, the “cheer-me-up” sermon, the “have hope” sermon, the “future is bright” sermon; it’s all good, only believe better! Such preaching, absent Christ and His cross, is wholesomely hopeful, urging us to hope only a little more, trust a little better, believe a little stronger. That will get you over the hump of doubt or despair or discouragement or disappointment or (fill in the blank). When you do, then you’re due some self-congratulations. We can believe and see that God satisfies us.

On the other side is the sermonic talk-down, the “moral scolding” sermon, the “do better, try harder” sermon, the “get-with-it” sermon; sermons urging more urgency, calling for more authenticity, more faithfulness, more obedience, more devoutness, more of what “once-was” and “needs-to-be-

“Good sermons and good preaching preach Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:24). This is critical. Without this, sermons become something else.”

again.” But sermons absent Christ and His cross (the gospel) inevitably make us place our faith in our faith (what’s the alternative?). Once you’re zeroed in on yourself, your own faith, there are only two paths: you’re driven to pride or you’re driven to despair. This “law” preaching absent the gospel either sends parishioners (and the lost) to the top floors of spiritual pride, self-deceit, even apathy (a form of spiritual conceit) or it brings them down to the basement of spiritual despair (self-loathing). Notice, though, in both forms of this sort of preaching your faith is on yourself. In both (the “cheer-me-up” sermon and the “chew-me-out” sermon) solace is to be found in you. This is not the gospel.

The undiscerning count both types of preaching as “good” preaching; but it isn’t! Such sermons are judged “good” sermons; but they aren’t, for both types focus our faith on our faith—not on Christ or His cross. This is not preaching that is centered on the gospel.

Exposition requires correct discernment of the biblical text, to be sure; but it also requires discernment of the gospel itself. Without that, the biblical message of the gospel is missed amid a myriad of moral exhortations—whether they be the pep-talk or the scolding.

Saying It Right

Of course, when we talk about “good” preaching, we are also talking about “saying it right.” Thus, good preaching is more than “true” preaching. We must admit, much true preaching is not served up in a particularly winsome way. Sometimes we hear sermons that cannot be faulted for their scriptural exposition or theological accuracy but they aren’t exactly easy on the ears or appetizing for the soul. “Saying it right” also counts, usually, as an ingredient in good preaching.

It is notable that good sermons speak to us, the hearers, from the get go. That is, they draw us into the biblical text early on, maybe in the opening sentence. Instead of being theological lectures or expository speeches, they bring Christ to us, calling us to Him. Such sermons are not merely emotive affairs or cerebral exercises. Rather, they make the Scriptural text a living event wherein we are confronted with God’s Word in our present, addressing our doubts, our failures, our needs, and our joys.

A good sermon, then, understands the hearers—it instinctively and deliberately brings the Word of God, from this passage of Scripture, to bear upon their circumstances. It discerns the knowledge and experiences we (the pew) have; it anticipates the questions we have and the objections we hide. It targets the silent resistances or doubts or worries or fears we harbor in our hearts. Good preaching, good preachers, know the human heart and bring the Word of God to bear on it; and the best preachers know the church culture of which they are a part—with its strengths and its compromises. Good preachers also have insight into the culture we live in—they “get the world” many of their parishioners inhabit; they understand how lost people think. “True,” but not exactly “good” preaching, misses this, whereas good sermons don’t; they’re aimed at what rolls around in parishioners’ heads, what temptations lurk in their hearts, what doubts plague their faith, what wounds afflict their lives, or what sorrows they carry around day-to-day.

Good preaching better understands the audience, exegeting the text of Scripture and the text of the human heart. Good preaching aims to say what the Bible says (what a specific text says) in a way prophetic for our time and place and cultural setting. “Say it right” sermons focus on the target audience like a scoped rifle. The target is in the cross-hairs of the biblical text. Poorer sermons lack a clear target; they are more like pointing a shotgun in a general direction, blasting away at the sky, hoping to hit something.

“Saying it right” is helped, not surprisingly, when the preacher gets to the point and makes the point! Many words do not improve sermons, for “saying it right” means “talk to me” from a biblical passage, not, “lecture about a biblical

passage” for me to overhear. Preaching is not a lecture. “Saying it right” has an additional aspect. We know that part of preaching is oratory. Yes, oratory matters; but it is not the decisive thing. Bad sermons can be delivered with tremendous oratory. Preachers should strive to improve in this area, but some preachers will never be great orators. But that is not the most important ingredient in good preaching.

Applying It Right

The above (saying it right) feeds into “applying it right.” A sermon without discerning application barely qualifies as a sermon, if at all. To be sure, some sermons are appropriately didactic (teaching and information-imparting) in orientation, even those sermons (doctrinally informative sermons) need to show the practical pay-out of such theological truth.

Application, however, is where many sermons run off the road. With the exposition, the sermon was rolling along fine; the pastor sprinkled in some well-placed illustrations, like helpful road signs along the way, to make the exposition clear; the scenery and landscape of the text are easy to see; next, the sermon rounds a curve on the way to application, but the curve proves to be, instead, an off-ramp; and, suddenly, the sermon heaves to a stop. The sermon has ended. The result: the preacher has asked us to get out of our car before we’ve reached our destination. “Good” preaching doesn’t do that but applies the biblical text thoughtfully, in keeping with what is the spiritual battle in view, and textually, in conformity with the text itself (usually doing what the text is doing). The preacher keeps in mind shallow Christians and hardnosed Christians, the despairing and the skeptics, the shamed and the prideful. Good preaching aims to “apply it right” by surveying souls. Poorer preaching does not exegete people well.

Too often a failure to “apply it right” is an outcome of the preacher expending too much time on exposition and too little forethought on who are the diverse souls hearing the message. “Applying it right” and “saying it right” usually go together. Application can begin in the introduction and not merely conclude as the conclusion. In fact, application can be woven throughout the sermon. Good sermons often do that. “Applying it right” is not simply tacking on some rhetorical questions at the end, bidding the congregation to wonder whether they are good enough, faithful enough, holy enough, cheerful enough, kind enough, urgent enough, obedient enough,

etc. Rhetorical scolding is usually its guise: “Are you?” “Do you?” In which case, it is up to the people in the pew to decide if the Cinderella slipper of the application fits their spiritual foot. “Applying it right” is more inviting, more

“Good preaching aims to ‘apply it right’ by surveying souls. Poorer preaching does not exegete people well.”

direct, and more personal. It doesn’t hide behind a veil of rhetorical questions, it invites: “You fail; seek His mercy.”

Application mucks around in the world of our hearts and brings the Word of God to bear on it so that believers and unbelievers search their hearts. Preaching that fails to do this—to search our hearts with the gospel—is frequently a flunk. “Good sermons” are calculated to “apply it right.”

The Holy Spirit’s Right

For all that, however, we must add, loudly and clearly, that good preaching, a good sermon, is not ultimately a human affair. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life, and of preaching. He makes our defective sermons effective. For He is the source of “unction”—that blessing wherein the preacher and the sermon become, in the event of preaching, God’s voice to us in the here and now. This cannot be commandeered, nor coerced. It is a divine gift to preacher and parishioner alike. The Holy Spirit blesses preaching as He sees fit; and in this way the preacher’s words become the Spirit’s work. This is a gift we can only pray for.

Finally, all preachers must admit that their sermonic efforts are blunt tools, ill-suited for the task. Yet, the Holy Spirit wields His sword and turns the sermon into a sharp blade that pierces hearts, dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12). Such sermons, by His working, are good enough to change us and save us!

We need to remain humble before God in that we do not deserve good preaching or good sermons. As preachers, we confess that we need God’s blessing upon our sermons, even with their shortcomings, so that He may be glorified and our hearers saved.

WELCOME BACK, BRIAN!

Brian Blummer ('11) has recently joined the staff at Mid-America as the Director of Enrollment Management. We caught up with him for an alumni profile to introduce him to the Seminary community and get his thoughts about the work of the Seminary.

Brian first came to Mid-America because of a friend—Roberto Rossi, who was a Mid-America student at the time. He attended seminary in order to be a chaplain. In 2013, he accepted a position as an intern hospital chaplain in Chicago, and then from 2015-2019 served as a chaplain in the Indiana Department of Correction. He serves as a deacon in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and, as of September 2019, the Director of

Enrollment Management for Mid-America.

We asked him a few questions to get his perspective on seminary training and Mid-America in particular.

What advice would you look to give to prospective or new students at Mid-America?

Embrace the process! Really soak in it, and use it how it's meant – learning about God's calling and direction for your life. When you look at it that way, worlds open up. Suddenly, applications, campus visits, financial aid worksheets – all of that becomes a part of a beautiful whole. All of us here are cheering you on. We want you to explore us, just as we're learning who you are and what the Lord is crafting

you to be. We want students who want to grow and develop. When the Spirit is calling and directing a student down our path—we don't want to be in the way! We want to be an open and hospitable resource to you. We want you to have access to our students, our faculty, and staff. We want your questions answered, your strengths affirmed, and any doubts relieved. You're about to make a large, and wonderful decision for your life. Use us to your advantage—I really mean it, we're cheering you on!

What do you perceive as Mid-America's greatest strengths?

Our emphasis on preaching the Word of God remains our primary strength. We stand behind our preaching commitment with the required practicum, the Ministerial Apprenticeship Program (MAP). We assist students with MAP placement while they maintain their studies and academics in the semester. Because of our unique partnership with many churches, and because of the generous support of our many friends, we remain one of the most affordable seminaries around. We want our students to graduate seminary able to serve Christ, not their debt load. Our academics are robust. Spiritual formation of our students remains a top priority also.

How do you hope to see Mid-America grow and improve upon those strengths in the future?

While there are constant pressures to drift from our core vision and purpose, I think our model for seminary education – focusing on personal and professional formation in a residential setting – is a good one. We need to get the word out! Please, help us! Mid-America is excellent, and our job is important in building up the next generation of Christ's pastors!

Rev. Nick Smith
Alumnus of '06



ALUMNI UPDATES

Jon Beall (2018) is the director of Master's Touch, a men's residential facility, part of Wayside Cross, in Aurora, IL. He has two children (5 and 2) and a daughter on the way in



October.

Bryce De Zwart (2019) is currently serving as a Pastoral Intern alongside Rev. Todd De

Rooy (2008) at Redeemer United Reformed Church in Orange City, IA. On September 10, 2019, Bryce passed his Candidacy Examination in Classis Central US of the URCNA and has been declared eligible for a call.



Andrew Eenigenburg (2008) is the Pastor of the West Sayville Reformed Bible Church (URCNA) in Long Island, NY.

"I am constantly grateful for my training at Mid-America through which God has helped us face the constant changes and challenges and sufferings of ministry. We thank the Lord for the conversions, evangelistic opportunities, ministry to mentally disabled persons, and service opportunities of this last decade. And we are also joyful to participate in works of mercy related to foster care."

Christian McShaffrey (2003) moved to Reedsburg, WI, immediately after his graduation in 2003 to plant an



Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In July of this year, the congregation purchased its first

building (a former Kingdom Hall of the Jehovah's Witnesses) with the help from churches is the OPC, URCNA, and BPC. The building was dedicated to the Lord's service on September 20, 2019.

Jeff Scott (2013) has been serving as the Pastor of Covenant Grace OPC in Roseburg, OR, since completing an internship at the church in 2014. Jeff, his wife, Dawn, and their five children are thankful for the wonderful way the Lord has integrated



them into the local community and the privilege of serving in this growing congregation. Jeff is active on committees of his presbytery and denomination.

Caleb Smith (2013) is currently serving as the Associate Pastor at Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Glenside, PA. He and his wife, Erika,

have two boys: Joel (2) and Oliver (4 months).

Steve (2007) and **Rachel Swets** are living in Hamilton, Ontario where Steve pastored the Rehoboth United Reformed Church. The past two years Steve has also taught in Kenya with



ITEM. Prior to Hamilton, Steve pastored a URCNA in Abbotsford, B.C. for 7 years.

IN MEMORIAM

The Mid-America community mourns the passing away of Rev. **Corey Dykstra**, who died on June 22, 2019. He is survived by his wife Jill and their children: Kyle, Lucas, and Sara. We extend our deepest Christian sympathy to Jill and her children, as well as to the Walker United Reformed Church, which Rev. Dykstra was serving at the time of his death. Rev. Dykstra was a 2010 graduate of Mid-America. After serving several Canadian churches as pulpit supply, he was ordained in the Walker URC (Grand Rapids, Michigan) in 2013. He earned a Th.M. degree from Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in 2018. Rev. Dykstra also served as secretary for Reformed Fellowship, and he spoke at young people's conventions in the summer. He will be greatly missed.

Larry W. Johnson, age 66, went to meet his Lord and Savior on Tuesday, October 15, 2019. Rev. Johnson was a 2000 graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary (his wife Sarah worked in the front office during his student years) and pastored URCNA congregations in Doon, IA, and Prinsburg, MN. At the time of his death he was a teacher in the OPC, serving as Bible teacher at Zion Christian School and as minister of visitation at Dutton United Reformed Church. The funeral service was on Saturday, October 19 at Dutton United Reformed Church, with Rev. Talman Wagenmaker and Rev. Brian Najapfour officiating.



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Tel: 219-864-2400

Fax: 219-864-2410

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