

Clergy Zoom Conversations  
Learnings from 2020 Festival of Homiletics (Virtual)  
Wednesday, May 27, 2020

Online 2020 Festival of Homiletics Theme: Preaching a New Heaven and a New Earth

Rev. Dawn Hand, Pittsburgh District Superintendent shared devotions based on Acts 2:1-3

The disciples were seated in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came

Where are you sitting right now? Has your seat position changed?

We all occupy a seat – fear, anxiety, doubt, depression, inadequacy, anger, contentment

Whatever seat you are occupying, you are not alone: God knows and God is with us

The Spirit will saturate us and agitate us out of our seats to be the church

Rev. Dr. Susan Moudry, WPAUMC Coordinator of Clergy and Lay Excellence

1) High View Observations and Take-a-ways

- a. No one way to preach, or best method, but best seemed somehow personal, speaking directly to audience and situation while clearly relating the text and its relevance
  - i. manuscript/no manuscript...structure...robed or not
- b. Preaching is contextual
  - i. Have to know your audience: what works for me won't work for you
  - ii. Being radically connected to your community
  - iii. The sermon is a good place to connect God to what is happening in life
- c. Bible in one hand, newspaper in the other (Barth) rings true...this connects the dots, speaks to people
- d. Need preachers to step up, speak to us...don't need leadership if we're not going anywhere- Bishop Will Willimon
- e. Don't have to shy away from saying hard things, it is part of the call
- f. Covid-19 Pandemic has made people ask more interesting questions, is there a word from the Lord? And the sermon is a great place to talk about this, people looking for it- Bishop Will Willimon

2) Best tips/suggestions

- a. Sermons should not be as long when recorded
- b. Not just congregation watching now, so need to think in terms of evangelism- Bishop Will Willimon
- c. Preaching aimed at ones who are not there yet; is it good news for one who needs to be saved, an outcast?- Rev. Dr. Katie Hays
- d. Can't drop new things, like online presence, so don't do unsustainable now, don't create a Frankenstein you have to kill- Rev. Dr. Raquel Lettsome
- e. SEAT method for sermon preparation
  - i. Savor (15 min one day)
  - ii. Exegete (1 hr next day, self and Bible, ask questions)
  - iii. Ask Others (could be same day, secondary sources)

- iv. Tie it Together...will lead to clearer focus, so won't take as long to preach- Rev. Dr. Raquell Lettsome
  - f. Strategies for engaging issues (Rev. Dr. Leah Schade)
    - i. Deliberate dialogue
      - 1. Preach
      - 2. Invite dialogue about the message: invite people to raise questions, dig deeper into text
      - 3. Preach a communal proclamation sermon (follow up)
        - a. See how the Holy Spirit has been at work within the community
- 3) What I walked away thinking about/Questions
  - a. Faithful preaching and teaching helps us know ourselves better, and to know God better
    - i. It is necessary in that way.
    - ii. Where do you as preacher (I) find this?
  - b. If preaching is a craft, you can't rush creativity
    - i. It requires a way of being in the world that cultivates your imagination.
    - ii. How do you (I) do this?- Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis
  - c. Disciple yourself to someone
    - i. Someone with better/different instincts, reform yourself, practice.
    - ii. Who do you (I) need to learn from?- Rev. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
- 4) Resources to use
  - a. WorkingPreacher.org
  - b. Virus as a Summons to Faith by (Walter Brueggemann)
  - c. Leading with the Sermon (Will Willimon)
  - d. A Lay Preacher's Guide (Karoline Lewis)
  - e. She Preaches
  - f. Modern Faith Podcast (Neichelle Guidry)

Reflections: Rev. Sara Wrona, New Beginnings/Vandergrift: First UMCs

- 1) Blessing of being able to worship and listen to others preach
  - a. All are feeling a level of exhaustion right now
  - b. Need to be a recipient to be renewed
- 2) Eight Characteristics of a Faithful Sermon (Karoline Lewis)
  - a. Biblical
  - b. Autobiographical
  - c. Contextual
  - d. Theological
  - e. Intellectual
  - f. Emotional
  - g. Inspirational
  - h. Faithful

- 3) Theme of “New Heaven & New Earth” was a reminder that the current Covid-19 situation has pushed down justice issues, creation care
- 4) God moment: when Cynthia Hale preached on Psalm 46; Sara has just used the same psalm in a webinar for daughter Katy & her staff in the Alabama-West Florida Conference. “Be still and know that I am God.”

Reflections: Rev. Bruce Stollings, McKnight UMC

- 1) Need to be timely and current in preaching
- 2) Real Healing, Not a Band-Aid sermon by William Barber (Jeremiah 6)
  - a. Faithful to the text while being faithful to our current reality
  - b. Quiet, understated power
- 3) Neichelle Guidry (interviewed by Karoline Lewis)
  - a. Calling for more dialogue in wrestling with the Word of God
  - b. In current time, we have the ability to be more present to our clergy colleagues
- 4) “Is it true, does it matter? (Katie Hays)
  - a. What we preach needs to be true but also needs to matter
  - b. Is this good news for someone who needs to be saved?

Highlights from Small Group Discussions (What is one thing you heard today that you can adopt to strengthen your preaching? Where are you able to hear preaching that affects you? What can you do to cultivate your preaching imagination?)

- 1) Moving to a new appointment is a great time to insert best practices into preaching
- 2) Need to dig deeper into our own context to know it better
- 3) Great opportunity right now to view colleagues’ preaching: learn, observe, refresh
- 4) Sometimes it is hard to listen to colleagues’ preaching: need to find time to immerse ourselves into listening to others
- 5) Online preaching brings a new context with new people, even more people
  - a. Needs of new people need to inform our preaching
  - b. New challenges for people who have been part of the church
- 6) Do things the simplest way during this new online season of ministry; don’t do something now that is unsustainable

**2021 Festival of Homiletics is May 17-21, 2021 in Denver, CO**