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INCLUDING OR EXCLUDING, EMBRACING OR “OTHERING”:  
DISMANTLING BARRIERS IN PREACHING TO LGBTQIA2 SIBLINGS IN CHRIST

by

MARY LOU BAUMGARTNER

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2020

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## ABSTRACT

### *Including or Excluding, Embracing or “Othering”: Dismantling Barriers in Preaching to LGBTQIA2 Siblings in Christ*

by

Mary Lou Baumgartner

How can preachers preach in ways that include rather than exclude, embrace rather than “other” our “hearers”? How can we be “culturally competent” in exegesis of Scripture and context, in our preparation for preaching, and in the oral event of preaching? How can we preach resistance against barriers that tear people asunder—and yet, at the same time, establish and model our own healthy and appropriate boundaries? How can we speak so that each “hearer” hears the gospel, the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ, instead of a word of rejection or “othering”?

This thesis:

- Explores Hebrew and Christian Scriptures through the lens of “othering,” noting how God sends God’s people to embrace the stranger in their common life.
- Uses the perspectives of biological and social sciences to examine the dynamics of “othering,” of ostracizing people and consigning them to the margins.
- Borrows the work of Walter Wink’s *Powers* Trilogy to understand “powers and principalities” such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism.
- Considers how social constructs of male privilege, white privilege, heterosexual privilege, abled privilege, and wealth privilege “other” persons and groups who lack privilege.
- Follows L. William Countryman’s argument in *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* that Jesus crossed boundaries of purity and is not afraid to live among us.
- Approaches preaching as an opportunity to embrace the “other,” to model words and actions of welcome to those who have been “othered,” and to nurture and challenge hearers to move beyond barriers against “others.” As an example, it

offers a case study of preaching strategies to embrace people who identify as LGBTQIA2 by attending to their language and their stories.

Advocating that the preacher develop awareness of their own boundaries and the borders and barriers that divide or “other” people who are marginalized (and focusing on the LGBTQIA2 community as an example), I offer preaching strategies to welcome and embrace “others” more fully and to model and proclaim more effectively—in word and deed—a posture of tangible hospitality for the purpose of growing community and deepening a congregation’s discipleship.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAB	Assigned Female at Birth
AMAB	Assigned Male at Birth
DMV	Demilitarized Zone
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ECUSA	Episcopal Church, U.S.A.
GCS	Gender Confirmation Surgery
HRT	Hormone Replacement Therapy
KJV	King James Version
MNYS	Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PCUSA	Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.
RCC	Reformed Church in America
UCC	United Church of Christ
UMC	United Methodist Church
U.S.	United States of America

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**My Motivation: Preaching’s Power to “Other”**

How can preaching “other”<sup>1</sup> a hearer? I remember the first time I heard a woman preach. She was a pastoral intern in our student congregation,<sup>2</sup> and she talked about the little girl—perhaps herself—who listened to the words of the Nicene Creed from the 1958 *Service Book and Hymnal*<sup>3</sup> and wondered if she was included in the people of God, if she was among those for whom Jesus came to earth. What caused this little girl such wonderment? Because as she heard the words, “who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven,” she wondered if Jesus literally came “for men,” and knowing she was not a man, she wondered if perhaps Jesus had not come for her salvation at all.

As a college student in the late 1970’s, I knew that according to proper contemporary grammar, “man” and “men” could be used instead of “people” to represent both women and men, but as I listened to that sermon I made a commitment that, should I become a preacher, I would never knowingly say something that would cause a hearer to wonder if the gospel was for her, or him, or them. What I did not know then was that I

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word “other” with these quotation marks to call attention to its use as a verb. Moving forward, whenever I use “other” as any part of speech (noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, or gerund phrase) it will not have quotation marks.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Bockelman, at Boe Chapel at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Lutheran Churches and Commission on the Liturgy and Hymnal, eds., *Service Book and Hymnal*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1958).

could easily leave someone to whom I preached out of the good news without even knowing it.

There are many ways hearers can be left out of sermons—and thus of fully receiving the gospel message. A person who is single hears examples only of people who are married or partnered. A youth of color hears periodically about people who have brown or black skin in the sermon, but they are represented as people to be pitied. A woman who has found herself to be infertile notices that her pastor’s sermon illustrations are usually about her cute children. A person who is on public assistance hears, more often than not, examples of people who are professionals. A person who identifies as gender-queer doesn’t know if they are included when the pastor says, “You are a beloved son of God! You are a beloved daughter of God!”

For the past sixty years,<sup>4</sup> the mainline Christian denominations in the United States in America have been experiencing steady declines in membership, financial health, and influence in the wider society. While there are many reasons for this downward trend, I propose that one significant cause has been the church’s lack of welcome of neighbors who don’t fit the model of Christian, white, middle-class heterosexual families with 2.5 children and the proverbial picket fence. We have erected barriers against these others which make it difficult for them to enter the Body of Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Tobin Grant, “The Great Decline: 60 Years of Religion in America,” *Religion News Service*, 1/27/2014, <https://religionnews.com/2014/01/27/great-decline-religion-united-states-one-graph/>. In this article, Grant collates “information from rigorous, scientific surveys on worship service attendance, membership in congregations, prayer, and feelings toward religion. Church attendance and prayer is less frequent. The number of people with no religion is growing. Fewer people say that religion is an important part of their lives. All measures point to the same drop in religion: If the 1950s were another Great Awakening, this is the Great Decline.”

In 1960, 91%<sup>5</sup> of U.S. residents attended Sunday worship, almost all of them gathering with people who were like them. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously noted that “11:00 o’clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour in Christian America.”<sup>6</sup> American culture supported church attendance—and the segregation of worshippers. Political candidates often quoted the Bible and sought the optics of a photo on the church steps. Communities designated times of the week free from sports and other public school activities (typically, Sunday morning and Wednesday evening) so that congregations could schedule worship and educational programs. Most stores and recreational businesses were closed on Sunday, so most people did not have to work.

In 2020, while 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning sadly continues to be the most segregated hour of the week, there are many fewer Americans segregating themselves in church during that hour. More and more Americans identify not as Christian (or Roman Catholic or Presbyterian or Baptist), but as Jewish or Muslim or Hindi or Mormon, and the most quickly growing “religious” identity is “none”—no religious affiliation.<sup>7</sup> Public and private schools schedule activities for almost any hour of the day or night, including Sunday morning. Stores are open seven days a week—and sometimes 24 hours a day!—and gyms, golf courses, movie theaters and restaurants are open on Sunday morning. Many people who might want to go to church may not be able to because they have to

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<sup>5</sup> “Religion,” Gallup, accessed 2/21/2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “The Most Segregated Hour in America,” interview on *Meet the Press*, 4/17/1960, audio, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L\\_d8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L_d8).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Lipka, “A Closer look at America’s Rapidly Growing Religious ‘Nones,’” *Pew Research Center*, 5/13/2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones/>.

work—or because they have to take their children to sporting activities so as not to lose their spot on the team. And there is always the internet, providing more shopping opportunities and a plethora of things to do—or buy. In 2020, there are so many more options for Sunday morning activities than there were in 1960, and most Americans—77%<sup>8</sup>—don't even consider weekly churchgoing as one of those options.

All of these factors contribute to the decline of the mainline denominations in the U.S., but we preachers have little control of any of them. What we preachers can control is what—and how—we preach. We can speak words of welcome and model postures of welcome to people who live in an increasingly diverse 24/7 culture with constant access to information, options, and stuff. Part of the irrelevance of our mainline denominations has to do with congregations' refusal to change, especially our inability to welcome the stranger, the one who is different from “us,” the one who has mental illness or brings a child with autism or who has experienced divorce or who is gay or does not have dress clothes to wear to church. We would prefer that that other would find somewhere else to worship, and so we (unconsciously) erect barriers to keep them out.

I long to preach in a church in which all others—including every single other!—are welcomed, regardless of ability, social competence, gender (or lack of gender), “race,” ethnicity, language of origin, educational or socio-economic level, sexual identity or orientation, family configuration, physical or mental illness, or wellness. While I am concerned most about the generic dynamic of othering (rather than, specifically, for example, how persons who live in wheelchairs are othered) and how the gospel of Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> Erin Duffin, “How Often Do You Attend Church or Synagogue?” *Statista*, 1/17/2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245491/church-attendance-of-americans>.

Christ compels us to receive every other (not just Spanish-speakers or people who live in poverty) as fellow members of the Body of Christ, the scope of this project does not allow for exhaustive exploration of how we preachers might preach to each group of othered individuals. For want of time and space, I am not able to examine every potential preaching strategy to welcome each othered individual.

Instead, as an example of rejecting the dynamic of othering and utilizing strategies of welcome, I focus on how we preachers might understand, learn from, receive the gifts of, and preach to the others in the LGBTQIA2 community. Why this specific community? First, because the language used by the LGBTQIA2 community is changing rapidly and dramatically while the language used by the broader culture about them has been slow to catch up. Still, we preachers need to attend to our own language; we must find ways to speak respectfully to and about persons in this community. Second, because the persons who identify as LGBTQIA2 face daily rejection and harassment in their schools, workplaces, places of business, and in their own families, we preachers, as the mouthpiece of God's outreach of love into the world, must counter such rejection and harassment. Third, because the church itself has a shameful record of not welcoming or supporting LGBTQIA2 visitors and members, we preachers must utilize our pulpit-power to model respectful language and behavior toward those who have been othered in congregations. We must demonstrate in our proclamation, in both word and deed, the good news that God in Jesus Christ loves and affirms these particular beloved of God who identify within the LGBTQIA2 spectrum. This focus does not mean, however, that we seek to welcome an LGBTQIA2 stranger above all other strangers; it is, rather, a lens

to explore the dynamic of othering and the opportunity we preachers have to counter that dynamic by speaking respectfully to and about others in the LGBTQIA2 community.

### **Thesis Statement**

Advocating that the preacher develop awareness of their own boundaries and the borders and barriers that divide or other people who are marginalized (and focusing on the LGBTQIA2 community as an example), I offer preaching strategies to welcome and embrace others more fully and to model and proclaim more effectively—in word and deed—a posture of tangible hospitality for the purpose of growing community and deepening a congregation’s discipleship.

### **Central Terms: Boundaries, Borders, and Barriers**

I am aware that the concept of boundaries is very complicated. I entered professional ministry at a time when voices were crying out in the wilderness on behalf of those whose physical, emotional, spiritual, or sexual boundaries had been violated by clergy or other church leaders. They cried out for pastors, bishops, congregational, and judicatory systems to listen to those who had been violated, to hear their stories, to comfort them, and to hold their abusers accountable. At that time, almost no church leaders listened, and the abuse and the damage it caused was compounded as those who bore the abuse initially were discounted or “invisibilized” or ostracized from their communities of faith.

Let me be clear: Abuse is not to be tolerated in the church. Boundaries must be maintained for the sake of the whole community. Congregations need to have in place

“Safe Church”<sup>9</sup> policies to minimize the risk of abuse of children and vulnerable adults by leaders, whether laity or clergy. Boundaries must be drawn clearly, interpreted publicly, and maintained constantly, and there must be procedures in place to respond in cases of accusation of abuse. But the very real need for appropriate boundaries in the church must not be used as an excuse to other someone by erecting barriers against those who might seem “scary” because they are different from “us.”

In this project I use “boundary” to refer to the lines drawn within communities to keep everyone safe; I understand these to be healthy boundaries. Except for cases in which scholars I quote specifically use the term “boundary” or “boundaries,” in this project, when I speak about boundaries that are drawn to separate people, I use “borders.” When I speak about boundaries that have been erected and held to keep others out, I use “barriers.” I understand both borders and barriers as harmful for those who are placed outside the lines, as they are othered, marginalized, and located outside of community.

### **Targeted Audience**

In this project, I address my preaching colleagues in the mainline Christian traditions, focusing on the six denominations with which my own church—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)—has mutual full communion

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<sup>9</sup> Many Christian denominations have developed “Safe Church” policies to guide congregations in forming internal policies and procedures in order to minimize the risk of abuse of parishioners by clergy or lay leaders. These are not intended so much as templates or boiler-plates as they are documents which help guide a congregation’s process of forming such policies and procedures, providing an opportunity for congregational learning through the process. The Lutheran congregation where I currently serve used “Safe Sanctuary” resources of the United Methodist Church to develop our congregational policy. See “Safe Sanctuaries General Guidelines and Policies,” Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church, last modified 10/22/2015, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/safe-sanctuaries-general-guidelines-starter-documents>.

relationships.<sup>10</sup> My argument is that our proclamation matters, and that our words, and the work of the Holy Spirit, can make a difference in the lives of those who are longing to hear a word of grace and mercy. Our words can embrace the stranger, or they can other them. Our words can contribute to a hearer’s perception of irrelevance or rejection—or invite them into community, to hear and see and touch and taste God’s love.

### **My Hermeneutic: “All at the Table”**

I apply an “All at the Table” hermeneutic, which invites preachers to gather at a common table to converse with many voices, especially those heretofore excluded or silenced. Among these voices are lay people, physical and social scientists, and theological and biblical scholars. I particularly seek out perspectives from women (Feminist, Womanist, Mujerista), people of color (African-American, LatinX, Asian, Indigenous), members of the LGBTQIA2 community (Queer), people who live with disability, and people who are poor or live among the poor (Liberation theology)—as well as voices of which I am not yet aware.

### **Overview of the Thesis**

In this Introduction, I identify my social location and explore why this thesis is needed. In Chapter 2, I scan Hebrew and Christian Scripture to discover a biblical posture toward strangers, using my “All at the Table” hermeneutic and the lens of othering to

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<sup>10</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), has mutual full-communion relationships: the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. (ECUSA), the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA), the Moravian Church, the Reformed Church in America (RCA), the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the United Methodist Church (UMC). See “Full Communion Partners,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed 4/1/2020, <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion>.

uncover a biblical approach to the other. In Chapter 3, I evaluate the dynamics of othering from perspectives in secular literature in order to identify the challenges for preachers to be aware of and to overcome in their preaching. In Chapter 4, I repeat that task with theological literature. In Chapter 5, I offer strategies for preaching to welcome others who enter our congregations in a way that invites them to return for more grace and more mercy, to hear the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ as news for them, and to share the gift of God's love by welcoming even more others. In Chapter 6, I consider what worked in the project and where improvements could be made. In Chapter 7, I note the contributions this project can make to the conversation in mainline denominations about how to preach in ways that embrace others. I also make some suggestions for next steps in my work and reflect upon the idea of boundaries, barriers, and borders in the unexpected times of the coronavirus outbreak.

### **My Social Location**

Born when my parents were serving as teaching missionaries of the UCC in Sendai, Japan, I have lived in six cities in Japan and eight states in the U.S., on both coasts and in the Midwest. My family tree on both sides and my own generation includes pastors and church musicians. A white woman of European heritage, I have ancestors who are Germans, German-speaking Swiss (Mennonites who joined the Evangelical and Reformed Church in the U.S.A.), and English-speaking Canadians (Baptists). My maternal grandparents were both college-educated, and my parents met in graduate school. When my father became a professor at a Lutheran college in Minnesota, we started attending a local Lutheran congregation.

After graduation from a Lutheran college in Minnesota, I served as a teaching missionary in Japan, started seminary training in Tokyo, married a Japanese man, transferred to a Lutheran seminary in Minnesota, did an internship in a Belizean congregation in California, and took a call to a central-city Lutheran congregation in Ohio. From my neighbors I learned what it meant to live in poverty and in generational poverty, and I realized how I took for granted the privileges I had, such as access to education, health care, transportation and child care.

My husband and I had three children. When the youngest was two, he disappeared in fear of loan sharks, and my income was immediately halved. Not long afterward, I declared bankruptcy and sought treatment for depression. When my struggling urban congregation applied for grants, I qualified as a person living at the poverty level, except for the fact that my poverty was “voluntary” as a religious leader. Without the help of my parents, my faith community, scholarships for my children, free school lunches, and generous friends, I would not have been able to give my children the privileges they had (for example: education, music and dance lessons, and sports opportunities).

I entered into a partnership with a woman who helped me raise my children. In those days, because my denomination—the ELCA—did not allow ordination of pastoral candidates who were in same-gender relationships, our relationship was constricted to the closet for me, although my partner was out as a lesbian. This secretiveness put a strain on our relationship, as did my carefully-considered and carefully-worded suggestion that she seek treatment at a mood disorders clinic. One day she, too, disappeared, leaving me alone, again, to raise my children.

Now, my children grown, I serve a middle-class, mostly white Lutheran congregation in a small town adjacent to a diverse city whose local public high school has no majority population. In my daily rounds, I encounter people whose future is bleak simply because their skin is black or brown, undocumented immigrants who fear deportation, teens who experience school bullying because of their sexual orientation, taxpayers who cannot afford health care but earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, workers whose occupation is constricted by felony records, people who suffer the effects of addiction or abuse or anorexia, and people who identify as transgender and are therefore mistreated in the health care and mental health systems, and the list goes on.

In the meantime, I have been blessed with a son-in-law who is a faithful Muslim and two grandchildren who are deeply rooted in their Muslim faith. I have been stretched beyond my own Christian understanding and practice to learn from and with them, and my life is richer for it.

So, I begin this study in the social location of a privileged, well-educated, middle-class professional Christian—and yet as someone who has spent years in settings in which I was in the minority—and in which I was earning much less than local colleagues and other people of equal education—and in which my husband was considered a foreigner—and in which my children never saw people like them—and in which my grandchildren are in danger of someday being labeled as terrorists—and in which, as a partnered but closeted lesbian, I had to hide that part of my identity from the church I loved and in which I served, in order to keep my job and feed my family.

I know something about what it means to be the other—as a woman, as a visible foreigner in Japan, as a woman in seminary, as a white person in a congregation of

immigrants from Belize, as a woman pastor among mostly male colleagues, as the wife of a non-white immigrant, as the mother and grandmother of children of mixed ethnic and religious heritage, as a person who lived in voluntary poverty, and as a closeted lesbian—but I do not pretend to know everything about being othered. Along the way I have been blessed to share the journeys of people who have far less privilege than I do—and who have been othered more visibly and blatantly than I have been. For their stories and their courage and their friendship, I give thanks. I long for the church, reflecting God's beloved community, to offer these others a welcome and a place to share their gifts, so that all of us can grow together into the Body of Christ and into the reign of God. I seek to preach—and to encourage others to preach—in ways that bring that vision into being.

### **The Problem**

We all (preachers, congregations, and judicatories in mainline Protestant churches in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) know that we are supposed to welcome all, include all, and embrace all people into our faith communities, but we fail, miserably, spectacularly, and consistently. Many among us are ostracized, excluded, or othered, and our community is bereft of the fullness of their presence.

Some members are active in our congregations without ever finding occasion to tell their stories of struggling with mental illness or addiction, surviving abuse or enduring the haunting aftermath of a suicide, or experiencing the joys and stresses of discovering sexual identity and/or sexual orientation and/or living in closeted relationships. Some are inactive, hiding in the shadows because they have absorbed a message that their troubles are to be left outside the doors of the church. These members

of the Body of Christ can never be fully present in the community, since they must leave parts of themselves outside the door.

Others stay outside the doors of our congregations, afraid to enter because of past rejection by the church or anticipated rejection by a particular congregation. Some of them have found faith in a church community only to be ignored or stared at or called names or, worst of all, literally excommunicated because, for whatever reason, they did not fit the mold of “Christian” according to those who have drawn the border. They bear wounds of unspeakable pain. And still others, never part of a faith community, have plenty of reasons not to belong to a church—or to consider entering a church—or even to entertain the possibility of believing in God, ever.

### **The Response**

How can our preaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century speak to those who are invisible or hidden, wounded or broken, both inside and outside our faith communities? How can we preach in ways that include rather than exclude, embrace rather than other our hearers? How can we be “culturally competent” in our reading of Scripture and our contexts, in our preparation for preaching and in the oral, audible event of preaching? How can we, as preachers, preach resistance against the barriers and borders that tear God’s people asunder? How can we change the way we speak so that each of our hearers can hear the gospel, the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ, instead of a word of rejection or dismissal or “invisibilizing”?

I intend to offer preaching strategies for the preacher to connect with each hearer, including the newcomer and those who are not traditionally or easily welcomed into the congregation as well as life-long Christian disciples. These strategies include, but are not

limited to: attending to Scripture's directive to welcome the stranger, offering hospitality to the most vulnerable, practicing welcoming language, choosing welcoming postures, and evaluating efforts and revising hermeneutics, manuscripts, and preaching practices as necessary, so that both preacher and the congregation may, in every way—intentionally, consciously, and joyfully—welcome all those who enter our doors.

## **Justification of the Project as Practical Ministry**

### **Why This Matters to Me**

I have spent much of my public ministry in multicultural contexts, sometimes as the outsider, albeit the “honored” white outsider, and sometimes in the privileged white majority. I served in Japan as a teaching missionary, teaching English conversation and leading Bible Studies in English, in congregations and at both boys' and girls' high schools. I began my theological education in Tokyo, listening to lectures in Japanese and reading and writing in English, and I continued studies in St. Paul, Minnesota where I taught English conversation to spouses of international students from Tanzania, Cameroon, Namibia, South Africa, and Japan. I did my pastoral internship in an urban Lutheran congregation in south central Los Angeles whose members were primarily persons of African descent, the majority being immigrants from Belize. During my final year in seminary, I worked as the International Student Coordinator.

My first call as a pastor in the ELCA was to a predominantly German congregation in Toledo, Ohio, located in the center of a neighborhood composed of persons of African-American, LatinX, and Appalachian heritage. In my two decades there, the neighborhood, which encompassed the two census tracts lowest in income in the city, endured a double assault by poverty and gentrification.

For the past ten years, I have been serving an ELCA congregation an hour north of New York City on the west side of the Hudson River. In our local high school there is no majority population among African-American, LatinX, white, and small numbers of Russian, Haitian, and South Asian students.

In these diverse contexts, the primary dynamic of my working life has been stretching—learning and growing so that I can behold the reign of God in the communities in which I have found myself. Over and over again, I have experienced God drawing the circle of the community of faith ever wider, always inviting me into deeper and fuller relationship with those who are different from me. At times, when I have sought to hold the circle steady, I have noticed Jesus standing outside the circle, next to those others, beckoning me to join him.

#### Why This Matters for My Ministry Context

In the ministry contexts in which I have served, there has been both flagrant and passive resistance to the outsider. In Japan, I frequently experienced the giggles of junior high school girls upon encountering a *gaijin* (foreigner), and there was never anywhere I went where I was not immediately and obviously seen as a *gaijin*. In my internship congregation, an African-American family (the first African-Americans who had joined decades earlier) was unwilling to welcome newcomers from Belize and was particularly resistant to the food the newcomers brought to the fellowship table. An usher once greeted a Latina woman at the door, kindly and firmly explaining that “the Spanish church is down the street.” When I began my pastoral career in Toledo, the Lutherans were afraid of the neighbors, and the neighbors were suspicious of the white people in “that church.” In my current congregation, located in a very diverse community, African-

Americans and Puerto Ricans have found welcome and are stepping into leadership positions alongside white charter members and newcomers from Egypt and Togo. But there is blatant resistance to the seminary-trained “female-identified gender queer” person who is six feet tall and has Asperger’s syndrome, who is mis-gendered and mistreated daily. It is my hope that this thesis study will help the congregation I serve become more aware of the ways they intentionally and unintentionally erect barriers against strangers, so that they can grow in hospitality and utilize best practices for welcoming those who appear to be other.

### Why This Matters for the Larger Christian Community

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, on the global scene, in the current political climate in the United States, and in the established denominational churches, we are quick to erect barriers, often pretending they are boundaries to keep us safe, using them as excuses to separate us from one another. We choose our own news outlets based on what we want to hear, and so we seldom need to consider issues from a perspective other than our own. So many things divide us: the neighborhoods we live in, the schools we go to or graduated from, the places we work or worked, the size of our income, the color of our skin, the continent on which our ancestors lived, the language we speak, the clothes we wear, the foods we eat, the politics we espouse, the beliefs we hold dear.

All of these differences, rich facets of our identities, can be a gift of learning from, celebrating with, and walking alongside one another in faith, but they can also be used as wedges to drive us apart. How can preaching in this 21<sup>st</sup> century both interpret and model healthy boundary-keeping without erecting barriers that keep others out? How can preaching help us to let go of our prejudices, addressing the racism, sexism,

homophobia, aporophobia (the fear of those who are poor), and other phobias rampant in our midst? How can preaching equip us to reach out to the “strangers” who do not fit into the worn-out categories we have drawn, inherited or affirmed in our faith communities, so that we might become with them friends, siblings in Christ, fellow members of God’s family?

### **Uniqueness of Thesis: Advancing Understanding and Practice**

The uniqueness of my thesis is threefold: 1) its scan of interdisciplinary perspectives, 2) its attention to LGBTQIA2 perspectives, and 3) its exploration of how the work of social and physical scientists and theologians can contribute to forming preaching which lifts up healthy boundaries to keep everyone safe, and at the same time, beckons both preacher and hearer alike beyond the barriers that pretend to keep us safe, thus circumscribing our lives.

### **Notes**

Periodically I use either the pronoun “she” or “he” throughout a given passage to refer to a preacher of any gender. For example, I might say, “The preacher finds her own voice” or “A preacher refers to his own experience.” Unless I am referring to a particular preacher in a given passage, I mean by the shorthand pronouns to say, “A preacher finds his/her/their own voice” or “A preacher refers to his/her/their experience.”

In Scripture references in parentheses in the body of this thesis, I denote gospel parallels of the same or very similar story by a “slash” symbol. For example, when I discuss the parable of the wicked tenants, I provide the following references (Matthew 21:33-46/ Mark 12:1-12/ Luke 20:9-19).

## CHAPTER 2

### ATTENDING TO SCRIPTURE'S DIRECTIVE: WELCOME THE STRANGER

We preachers seek to preach the Word of God. Although we proclaim this Word in our own fallible human words, the Word we speak is not our own. We boldly and humbly believe that God speaks *to us*—and then *through us*—to God's people *in God's own Word*.

How does this Word of God come to us? How does God speak to us, how can we hear what God is saying, and how do we know that God's Word is what we hear? I posit that God's Word is most authentically heard in a chorus of voices, in the preacher's conversation with lay readers of Scripture and with a diversity of biblical scholars. While not dismissing the work of practitioners of historical biblical criticism, we preachers must also hear the voices of those from a variety of contexts, attending to their critique of traditional scholarship and the questions they ask of the texts themselves. At the same time, we must listen to the questions and insights of our hearers as well.

As a theologian, a biblical explorer, and a preacher, I come to the Word of God with my own experience of life and my own history of encounter with Scripture, valuing my own voice and yet seeking to listen to other voices, whether lay or professional—and, in particular, the voices of those who have been othered. This “All at the Table” hermeneutic demands that preachers gather to listen to many voices at a common table, especially those heretofore excluded. Among those voices are scholars (and their hermeneutics): women (Feminist, Womanist, Mujerista), people of color (African-

American, LatinX, Asian, Indigenous), members of the LGBTQIA2 community (Queer), people who live with disability, and people who are poor or live among the poor (Liberation theology)—as well as voices of which I am not yet aware. This hermeneutic of listening to a whole community of voices is not limited to any one of these voices or any subset of voices; it is rather a conversation among all of them, the communities they represent, and an openness to hearing the voices of prophets emerging among us.

Obviously, the preacher who prepares a sermon weekly cannot possibly survey commentators from every single social location in the reading of every text, but she can continue deepening her awareness of various hermeneutics and borrow their questions in an effort to preach in ways that include those whose voices have not traditionally been heard in the academy or in the pulpit. My “All at the Table” hermeneutic is one in which I will continue to learn from and incorporate the voices of others as I encounter them.

Seeking to listen to my own voice and the other voices of others, whether lay or professional, traditional or othered, I now begin this exploration of othering and welcoming in preaching by attending to how God’s Word in Hebrew and Christian Scripture speaks about the other and how it directs us to live with one another in the wondrous diversity of our local and global world.

## Insights from Hebrew Scripture

A broad, though admittedly shallow look at Hebrew Scripture<sup>1</sup> yields four insights about what God expects from God's people in regard to their neighbors, to those who live near them or among them. Each of these will be examined briefly:

- 1) God sends Israel to cross borders.
- 2) God intends that Israel receive strangers into their midst.
- 3) God sends Israel out as a blessing to the nations.
- 4) God sends the other to show the way of righteousness.

### 1. God Sends Israel to Cross Borders

*[T]he Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs.'* (Genesis 15:13)<sup>2</sup>

Ancient Israel as a people is no stranger to crossing borders and becoming “strangers” and “aliens” in foreign lands (Genesis 23:4). Repeatedly, God sends Israel, God's blessed and beloved people, to cross borders and become aliens<sup>3</sup> outside of their known territory. Over and over again they immigrate (or are forced to migrate) to new lands and become aliens, following the pattern set by their ancestor Abram (Genesis 12).<sup>4</sup> Obeying the Lord's command, Abram leaves his home in Haran in Ur, to “go . . . to the

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<sup>1</sup> Space restrictions prevent me from thoroughly examining the concept of othering and welcoming the stranger in the whole of the Hebrew Bible. I have focused my exploration primarily on the Books of Torah and Isaiah.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup> As I cite “alien” in Hebrew Scripture, it refers primarily to someone who is not native to the people of Israel, to someone who does not belong in the community of God's people by virtue of birth or heritage, but it is also used to describe God's people who live in a land foreign to them. A primary contemporary dynamic of othering is using “alien” to refer to immigrants to the United States, often judging such persons as “illegal aliens.”

<sup>4</sup> In this section on the Hebrew Bible, I identify Abram by the name he was called in the story I am quoting. God gives him a new name in Genesis 17:5, but my argument is not chronological, so I call him Abram or Abraham based on the name used in the biblical text.

land that [the Lord] will show [him]” (Genesis 12:1), crossing over borders and becoming alien upon entry into Canaan (Genesis 17:8). Traveling to Egypt, and then again upon returning to Canaan, he becomes an alien, a stranger in a strange land.

This pattern continues generationally. Abram’s son, Isaac, becomes an alien when he moves to Gerar. Isaac’s son, Jacob, flees from his brother Esau and crosses into Haran, becoming an alien there, albeit among his kin. He returns, settling in Canaan “where Abraham and Isaac had resided as aliens” (Genesis 35:27). Joseph, carried by slave traders over the border into Egypt, becomes an alien there, and when his brothers arrive in Egypt to escape a famine, they, too, become aliens, along with their entire clan.

Moses, too, crosses borders, becoming an alien over and over again. In infancy, he is placed beyond the border of the Hebrew people and becomes an alien in Pharaoh’s palace. When he escapes Egypt after committing murder, he becomes an alien in Jethro’s home in the land of Midian. Upon returning to Egypt to lead the people of Israel out of slavery, he becomes an alien there—and then, again, in the wilderness of Sinai. The Israelites, too, are alien in the wilderness, and yet again when they enter Canaan, where they settle and spread out by tribes into land that later becomes Israel, Judah, and Samaria. For some centuries the people are “at home” in Palestine, until they are carried into Assyria and later into Babylon. In these nations, too, they are aliens, strangers in a strange land. And upon their return to Judah, they become strangers, again, in their “own” land.

Moving back and forth across the borders of Ur, Canaan, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, the people of Israel know what it is to be strangers in a strange land. As

individuals, as tribes, as a nation, they cross borders, repeatedly becoming aliens as they encounter new lands, new languages, and new customs among new hosts or captors.

## 2. God Intends that Israel Receive Strangers in their Midst

*The Lord said, “You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:19)*

Hospitality to strangers is a cardinal virtue in ancient Israel. God expects that, as God’s people have experienced life as strangers and aliens, they will offer hospitality to others, that their experience as strangers will inform their treatment of the strangers among them.

Two chapters in Genesis underline this priority in practice. In Genesis 18, sometimes called “The Hospitality of Abraham,” Abraham is visited by three men who come to see him bearing joyous tidings of Sarah’s impending pregnancy. Seeing the men, Abraham at once runs “from the tent entrance to meet them, [bows] to the ground, [and entreats them], saying, “do not pass by your servant (Genesis 18:2-3).” He directs his servants to bring water so that the guests may wash their feet. Sparing no expense and no time, he offers them rest while he organizes the servants to prepare a feast of bread, roasted calf, curds, and milk. After, they tell him, “your wife Sarah shall have a son” (Genesis 18:10). Sarah, eavesdropping, laughs out loud, and two of them depart while the third, “the Lord,” remains with Abraham.

In Genesis 19, the two beings—now identified as angels—arrive in Sodom, seeking hospitality in the town square. Lot, echoing Abraham’s actions at Mamre, “[rises] to meet them and bows his face to the ground” (Genesis 19:1) and invites them to spend the night in his home. He, too, prepares a feast, and bakes unleavened bread. When

Lot's neighbors, the men of Sodom, show up intending to rape the guests, Lot, practicing hospitality to the angels, resists the men, offering instead his daughters, saying, "let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof" (Genesis 19:8). While the misogynistic treatment of his own daughters is unacceptable in our day, Lot's care for the angels demonstrates the high value of hospitality to strangers in his culture, even though it meant putting his family members' own lives on the line. While this chapter is most often called "The Depravity of Sodom," it might more properly be titled "The Hospitality of Lot."

Frequently, Hebrew Scripture makes clear God's expectation that the people of Israel care for aliens and that aliens participate in the life God has for Israel, both in receiving good and in practicing good. These expectations include the following...

[T]here shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you. (Exodus 12:49, 24:22; Leviticus 18:26; Numbers 15:16)

[T]he seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, ... or the alien resident in your towns. (Exodus 20:10, 23:12; Deuteronomy 4:14)

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Leviticus 19:34)

[Y]ou shall not oppress or deprive [but care for] the poor and the alien. (Leviticus 19:1, 23:22, 25:23; Deuteronomy 23:7, 24:19, 26:13, 28:43; Zechariah 7:10)

Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate... (Deuteronomy 26:11, 31:12)

The Lord expects the people of Israel to welcome the aliens in their midst so that they might participate in the life of Israel, obeying the law, keeping sabbath, caring for the poor and the alien, and celebrating the Lord's goodness.

### 3. God Sends Israel out as a Blessing to the Nations

*[The Lord] says,  
 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
 to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
 and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
 I will give you as a light to the nations,  
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'* (Isaiah 49:6)

Over and over again, God sends God's people to cross borders in order to bless their non-Israelite neighbors. To Abram, God promises, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3). God blesses Egypt with abundant crops during a famine through the wisdom of the foreigner Joseph, whose Israelite brothers had sold him into slavery. Naomi leaves Israel to find food in time of famine, and God uses her to bless her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth (a descendant of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter who becomes an ancestor of King David). Isaiah offers a vision of the descendants of Abraham extending God's salvation "to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

### 4. God Sends the Other to Show the Way of Righteousness

*For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name [Cyrus], I surname you, though you do not know me.* (Isaiah 45:4)

Consistently throughout Hebrew Scripture, the Lord chooses servants not only from among the chosen people of Israel, but also from among those who are strangers or aliens—or even enemies—of Israel. God sends the other to show the way of righteousness, pointing Israel to the Lord. Eliezer, a Syrian from Damascus, becomes Abram's servant and original heir (Genesis 15:2); he is sent to find a wife for Isaac so that God's promise of descendants may be fulfilled (Genesis 24). Hagar, Sarah's

Egyptian slave-girl, is the only one who names God in the Torah, saying, “You are El-roi, ‘the God who Sees’” (Genesis 16:13). Rahab, a harlot in Jericho, recognizes the authority of the Lord (Joshua 2:9-11), and when Joshua’s troops invade Jericho, she hides them from the men of Jericho. Ruth chooses the faith of her mother-in-law Naomi and becomes the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:21-22). A widow of Zarephath feeds the prophet Elijah, even though she herself is near starving (I Kings 17:8-15). King Cyrus, whose spirit “the Lord stirred up” (Ezra 1:1), proclaims an end to Israel’s captivity in Babylon, declaring: “‘The Lord, the God of heaven... has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem.... Any of you who are of his people—may God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord’” (Ezra 1:2-4). God uses strangers and aliens—and even enemies—to do God’s work among God’s people.

## 5. Summary

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the people of Israel cross borders and interact with others. God sends them to become aliens, to utilize their experience as aliens to inform their relationships with the strangers in their midst, and to bless the nations beyond their borders. God also sends foreign others to show Israel the way of righteousness.

### **Insights from Christian Scripture**

*There is now no Jew nor Greek, no slave nor free,  
no man and woman, for all are one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28)

The New Testament, following the witness of the Hebrew Bible, is full of hints of God’s intention to embrace the whole world, people of every nation and language, every culture and ethnicity, every gender and ability. In the four gospels and the book of Acts,

we find direction to welcome the stranger. At times, this welcome requires a literal, physical crossing of borders; at other times, it demands a raising of social barriers or a re-drawing of symbolic barriers.

### Gospels

In the four canonical gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we encounter Jesus as an example of God's hospitality. He is almost always ready to welcome the other, to cross barriers to embrace those who do not belong. In the gospels, others whom Jesus welcomes include those with physical or mental illness, women, "little ones" (children, the poor), and those of questionable reputation, ethnicity, or religion, against whom his Jewish culture had erected barriers.

#### 1. Jesus Dismantles Barriers of Illness and Disability

In Jesus' ministry in the synoptics, healing in body, mind, or spirit takes center stage alongside preaching and teaching. While John records only three healings, he offers the most in-depth story of a healing by Jesus (the man born blind in John 9). When the man is expelled from the synagogue (a barrier erected against him), Jesus goes searching for him in order to offer him spiritual as well as physical healing.

In the ancient world of the gospels, illness sets a barrier that separates the person who is ill from their community. Jesus demolishes that barrier by healings that seem prodigal to religious leaders. Nowhere does Jesus judge those who are ill as responsible for their illness, deserving of physical or mental suffering or ostracization (see John 9:2-3); instead, he walks with them and grants them health and restoration into community. Among those on whose behalf he demolishes barriers are persons with a withered hand, (Matthew 12:14/ Mark 3:5/ Luke 6:10), hemorrhages (Matthew 9:18-26/ Luke 8:40),

fever (Mark 1:31, 4:39/ John 6:9), dropsy, edema (Luke 14:1-4), skin diseases (Matthew 8:3/ Mark 1:42/ Luke 5:13), and spinal damage (Matthew 9:2-8), as well as a woman bent over and those who cannot see, hear, speak, or walk (Matthew 15:31/ Mark 7:37/ Luke 7:22). He also exorcises demons (Matthew 8:28-34/ Mark 5:1-20/ Luke 4:35), unclean spirits (Mark 1:25-26/ Luke 9:37-43) and even restores the dead to life (Matthew 9:18-26/ Mark 5:42/ Luke 7:11-17/ John 11:1-45). Jesus does not shun or judge those with illness or disability. Instead, smashing the barriers of his time, he engages them, heals them, forgives them, loving them as they are.

## 2. Jesus Dismantles Barriers Around Gender

At the very beginning of his gospel, Matthew chooses to include five women in his genealogy: Tamar (Matthew 1:3), Rahab (Matthew 1:5), Ruth (Matthew 1:5), Bathsheba, “wife of Uriah” (Matthew 1:6), and Mary (Matthew 1:16). Each of these women has an irregular identity or a questionable heritage;<sup>5</sup> each is, in one way or another, a “sinner,” whether she “sinned” or was sinned against. Nevertheless, Matthew includes them.

Although no women are named among the twelve disciples in all four gospels, women are among those to whom Jesus preaches and teaches—and among those whom he heals. He heals women who were bleeding (Matthew 9:12/ Luke 8:43), bent over

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<sup>5</sup> These women are included in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. Tamar (Matthew 1:3) is the mother of Perez by her deceit of her deceased husband’s father, Judah, who twice denied her the protection of levirate marriage. Rahab is a prostitute who protects Joshua’s troops in Jericho (Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25). Ruth (Matthew 1:5), a Moabite, and thus a foreigner to Israel, is the mother of Obed by her husband Boaz and great-grandmother of King David (Matthew 1:6). Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:3), identified as “the wife of Uriah” (Matthew 1:7) is the mother of Solomon by King David, who had earlier raped her (II Samuel 11:4) and engineered the death of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 11:6-17). Mary is the mother of Jesus, impregnated by the Holy Spirit to the chagrin of her husband, Joseph, and thus suspected of adultery (Matthew 1:18-25).

(Luke 13:11), fevered (Mark 1:30)—and a young girl at the point of death (Matthew 9:18). He also heals the beloved of women who request healing: a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:22/ Mark 5:25) and a widow of Nain (Luke 7:12). Women, in turn, take care of Jesus. Martha welcomes him into her home (Luke 10:38), Mary listens to him (Luke 10:39), and Joanna and Susanna care for him out of their resources (Luke 8:3). Women also follow him from Galilee (Luke 23:49), minister to him (Luke 8:3), and gather at the cross and the empty tomb (Matthew 27:55-61/ Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-2/ Luke 23:49, 24:1/ John 19:25, 20:1), staying with Jesus until the end.

Jesus also points to women as models of right behavior and as metaphors for God. Luke introduces us to widows, including Anna, who blessed the child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:37), a widow who put two small copper coins into the treasury (Luke 21:2), and a widow who fed the prophet Elijah (Luke 4:26), trusting that if she shared everything she had, God would take care of her. Jesus teaches about relationships with God through stories about a woman in labor (John 16:21), a persistent widow who needled a judge into hearing her case (Luke 18:5), a woman who kneaded bread dough (Matthew 13:33/ Luke 13:21), and a woman who lost one of her ten dowry coins and swept the house until she found it (Luke 15:8).

Jesus also has significant conversations with women, especially in the gospel of John. The longest conversation Jesus has with anyone in the gospels is with the Samaritan woman at the well. After they talk about “living water,” he sends her out as a witness to her neighbors (John 4:1-42). He also speaks with a woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11) and with Mary Magdalene in the garden (John 20:11-23). It is women to whom the risen Christ first appears (Matthew 28:1-10/ Luke 24:1-11/ John 20:11-18; in

Mark 16:5, it is not Jesus, but a young man, who tells the women the news of resurrection). These women are then sent out by Jesus (or, in Mark, the young man) to tell the news of resurrection to the other disciples. Women are integral to Jesus' ministry and his mission; they both receive and share the good news.

### 3. Jesus Dismantles Barriers Around Age and Status

The synoptics highlight Jesus' concern for "little ones." These little ones include children (and even infants—Luke 18:15) "brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray" (Matthew 19:13/ Mark 10:13/ Luke 18:15). In spite of his culture's devaluing of children, Jesus points to children as models for discipleship: "Whoever does not receive the kingdom as a child will never enter it" (Luke 18:17), and "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:36/ Luke 9:48). He corrects his disciples' attempts to keep children away from him, recognizing them as ones "to whom the kingdom of God belongs" (Matthew 19:14/ Mark 10:14/ Luke 18:16) and healing them (Matthew 9:18-26/ Mark 9:14-29/ Luke 8:41-56; Matthew 15:21-28/ Mark 7:24-30; Matthew 17:14-18/ Mark 9:14-27/ Luke 9:37-43/ John 4:46-54). In John, he interacts twice with children, healing an "official's son" (John 4:46-54) and receiving barley loaves and fish from a boy (John 6:9) to feed the 5,000.

The term "little ones" incorporates more categories than children, however. In Matthew's gospel, it includes the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6), those who are sick, leprosy, or have demons (Matthew 10:8), those who are hated or persecuted by all because of Jesus' name (Matthew 10:22-23) and those who lose their life for Jesus' sake (Matthew 10:29). Mark's little ones include those unwell in body or spirit (Mark 9:20) and disciples who are servants of all (Mark 9:34). Luke's little ones include an

offending disciple (Luke 17:3) and a person who sins seven times a day (Luke 17:4), as well as Lazarus, a poor man covered with sores (Luke 16:19-31).

#### 4. Jesus Dismantles Barriers Between Wealth and Poverty

Within Jesus' concern for "little ones" is a concern for the poor and an expectation that his disciples will care for them. In each synoptic, Jesus responds to a rich man (or ruler) who comes to him seeking eternal life. In Matthew 19:21-22, Jesus tells this rich man, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." In Mark 10:21-23, Jesus, "looking at [the man, loves him and says], 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'" In Luke 18:22, Jesus says, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." In all three versions of the story, Jesus points out, "how hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:23/ Mark 10:23/ Luke 18:24). These pericopes highlight the ways wealth erects barriers which may hinder the disciple from following Jesus or going deeper in their faith.

Jesus in Luke bears a particular concern to care for the poor. He tells at least five parables about the use or misuse of wealth in relationship to the poor: "The Rich Fool" (Luke 12:13-21), "Humility at the Banquet" (Luke 14:7-11), "The Shrewd Manager" (Luke 16:1-13), "Lazarus and the Rich Man" (Luke 16:19-31), and "The Tax Collector and the Pharisee" (Luke 18:9-14). He also teaches about wealth and poverty in commandments and proverbs. These stories and sayings sort into four directives, some of

which are expressed in the negative. For example, the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) serves as a model of what not to do with God-given wealth (i.e., Do not hoard and store riches, precluding others from its benefits).

In Luke there are four facets to Jesus' attitudes toward money. These are as follows<sup>6</sup>...

- Do not rely on wealth; possessions are not the sum of human life.
- Trust in God; all your good comes from God, and God will take care of you.
- Do not let wealth enslave you. Do not use economic power against others.
- Share what God has given you with those in need, since God gives you all that you have and expects you to use your wealth for the sake of others, in God's service. Live in humility and generosity.

#### 5. Jesus Dismantles Barriers Around Occupation and Reputation

Jesus also lifts up groups of people as worthy in the reign of God who are considered others by virtue of their occupation, particularly tax collectors and prostitutes, who were, according to the Pharisees, "sinners," because they did not keep the Jewish law. Jesus calls tax collectors (despised both for their collusion with Rome and for their

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<sup>6</sup> **1. Do not rely on wealth.** (See Luke 12:15, 20, 21—The Rich Fool; Luke 16:14—The Pharisees, Lovers of Money; and Luke 16:25-26—Lazarus and the Rich Man.) **2. Trust in God.** (See Luke 12:21—Treasure or Richness towards God; Luke 12:29-31—God knows your need; strive for God's reign; Luke 14:12—Invite not family or rich friends but people who cannot repay you; Luke 16:19-31—No Choice for Lazarus but to trust God. Luke 18:9—The Pharisees trust not in God, but in self; Luke 8:13—The tax collector trusts in God's forgiveness; Luke 19:1-10—God seeks and saves Zacchaeus.) **3. Do not let wealth enslave you.** (See Luke 14:8—Humility at the Banquet; Luke 16:13—You cannot serve God and wealth; Luke 16:18—The Widow and the Unjust Judge; Luke 18:8-12—The Pharisee trusts in self and regards others with contempt; Luke 18:13—The tax collector pleads for mercy, for he is a sinner; Luke 20:46-47—The scribes devour widow's houses.) **4. Share what God has given you.** (See Luke 14:33—None can become my disciple and keep their possessions; Luke 16:1-2—The rich man shares not even a little of what God gives him; Luke 18:8-30—The rich young ruler is very sad, because he has so much money that he can't share any of it; Luke 19:1-10—Zacchaeus pledges to give to the poor and those he had defrauded; Luke 21:1-4—The widow gives everything she has.)

penchant for taking more from their Jewish clients than what was required by Rome) to follow him (Luke 5:27) and eats with them (Mark 2:16/ Luke 5:30). He seeks “to save” them, particularly Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and even identifies a tax collector as “justified” because he humbled himself rather than a Pharisee who exalted himself (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus notes that tax collectors and prostitutes (i.e., “sinners”) are going into the kingdom of God ahead of [the chief priests and elders]” (Matthew 21:31). In response, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of eating with sinners (Mark 2:16/ Luke 5:30).

## 6. Jesus Dismantles Barriers Around Ethnicity

Matthew expands the context of his gospel to the world stage when he records the visit of the wise men from the East (foreign others) to worship “the child who is to be born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). Representing the nations of the world, these wise men from distant lands, who “observed [Jesus’] star at its rising... have come to pay him homage” (Matthew 2:2). Traditionally, their worship of the infant Jesus, the first proclamation of the gospel among the Gentiles, foreshadows the coming of all nations to worship the Messiah. After the wise men leave, the Holy Family become aliens, when Joseph follows the direction of an angel of the Lord to take Jesus to Egypt to protect him from Herod, who is out to kill him. Upon Herod’s death, Joseph, again following the instruction of an angel of the Lord, takes the family back to Israel, where he is warned in a dream to go not to the family’s hometown of Bethlehem, in Judea, where Herod’s son is king, but, instead, to Nazareth, in Galilee. Like his Jewish forebears Abraham and Joseph, Jesus finds himself to be an alien, a stranger, an other, first in Egypt and later in Nazareth of Galilee. At the end of his gospel, Matthew’s Jesus sends his disciples out into “all the world” (Matthew 28:20).

In Luke, Jesus also includes those who are considered other by their ethnicity. In his inaugural sermon (Luke 4:16-30), Jesus points to one foreigner to whom God sent help (Naaman the Syrian in Luke 4:27 and II Kings 5:1-14) and to another from whom God expected help (the widow of Zarephath in Sidon in Luke 4:26 and II Kings 17:8-16). In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus lifts up the foreigners of Tyre and Sidon, who “would have repented” (Matthew 11:21/ Luke 10:13), and of Nineveh, who “repented” (Matthew 12:41/ Luke 11:32), as well as the queen of the south, who “came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon” (Matthew 12:42/ Luke 11:31).

#### 7. Jesus Dismantles Barriers Around Religion

In the Gospels, foreigners are others not only because they do not belong within the people of Israel ethnically, but also because they are Gentiles. Religiously, they are non-Jews. Yet Jesus embraces such others as they come to faith in him. In Matthew 8:10, after a Roman centurion (a Gentile, who is in charge of 100 imperial troops) begs for healing for his servant, Jesus is “amazed” at the centurion’s faith, and says, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.” In Luke 7:1-10, Jesus heals a centurion’s slave, “whom he valued highly.” Here, Jesus, again “amazed, says, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith’” (Luke 7:9).

The most dramatic story of Jesus’s encounter with an other is recorded in Matthew and Mark. In both stories, a Gentile woman approaches Jesus to ask him to heal her daughter from a demon, and in both accounts, Jesus initially rejects her request, citing her identity as a Gentile. He grants healing only after she convinces him that, even as a foreigner and a Gentile, she is worthy of Jesus’ attention and his healing power. In Matthew 15:21-28, she is a Canaanite woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon. In

Mark 7:24-30, she is of Syrophenician origin. In both accounts, once Jesus is converted by her “faith” (in Matthew) or her persistence (in Mark), her daughter is healed.

#### 8. Others Witness to the Good News in the Gospels

Following the pattern set by the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels point to aliens, strangers, people who are sinners, those who don’t belong (in a word—others) as unexpected witnesses to the reign of God. Among several such individuals are a barren woman who bears John the Baptist (John 1:7), a young woman who bears the Messiah (Luke 1:34), a Samaritan healed of leprosy who returns to give Jesus thanks for healing (Luke 17:11-19), a widow who gives two coins, everything she has (Luke 21:1-4); a Samaritan who offers testimony to her townspeople that leads them to believe in Jesus (John 4:39), a woman who blesses Jesus with ointment for burial (Matthew 26:6-13/ Mark 14:3-9/ Luke 7:36-50/ John 12:1-8), and a boy, a mere child, who is willing to share his bread and fish for Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-14).

#### 9. Jesus Shows a New Way

While each of the four gospels is targeted to a different audience, they have this dynamic in common: Jesus is (almost always) willing to dismantle barriers for the sake of the other; the thrust of each gospel is outward. Matthew is written to a predominately Jewish audience of Christians, while Mark has Gentile converts in mind. Luke writes to Gentile Christians in a predominately Gentile setting, and John writes to Jewish believers in Jesus who continue to worship in the synagogue. But regardless of whether the intended audience is Jewish or Gentile, Jesus is presented as one who purposely crosses barriers in order to deliver his message of God’s love for all people.

## 10. God's Reign of Righteousness

God's desire to share God's love is so strong that, if God's people break the covenant, God takes God's reign away from them. Jesus tells a parable (Matthew 21:33-46/ Mark 12:1-12/ Luke 20:9-19) to warn that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from [the Jews] and given to a people [i.e., the Gentiles] that produces the fruits of the kingdom" (Matthew 21:43) and another parable (Matthew 22:1-10) to indicate that, since those "invited to the wedding banquet" (i.e., the Jews) did not respond, God invites others (i.e., the Gentiles) in their stead, so that God's desire to include all people in God's reign is realized as the "wedding hall [is] filled with guests" (Matthew 22:10). God, concerned primarily with producing fruits of righteousness, takes God's reign away from any who do not produce that fruit, whether Jew or Gentile.

## 11. Family in God's Reign of Righteousness

Jesus, in the synoptics, speaks about the community he gathers as a new kind of family in the reign of God: "For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12: 50/ Mark 3:35); "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:19). And, in John, Jesus creates a new family as he hangs on the cross, saying to his mother, "Woman, here is your son" and then to his disciple, "Here is your mother" (John 19:26). This new family is one that offers mercy and, at the same time, demands commitment.

## 12. Leadership in God's Reign of Righteousness

In all four gospels, Jesus both commands and models leadership as servanthood. A leader is, first of all, God's servant (Matthew 12:18), following God's mission for the sake of the world, sourcing their authority in relationship with God (Matthew 28:19-20/

Luke 20:1-18). Servant leaders love God and their neighbors (Mark 12:29-31), each other (John 13:3-5, 14, 31-35; 15:12-17), and their enemies (Mark 5:43-47/ Luke 6:27-36). They live in humility (Luke 14:7-11), eschewing worldly greatness (Matthew 20:20-28, 23:12/ Mark 9:33-37, 10:25-35/ Luke 9:46-48, 22:24-27), extending hospitality to friend and stranger alike, and embracing a trusting and child-like faith. They follow Jesus, bearing the cross (Matthew 10:38, 16:24/ Mark 8:34/ Luke 9:23-24), forgiving (Luke 3:42-43/ John 8:7), and giving everything for the sake of the kingdom of God (Mark 12:44).

### 13. Summary: Jesus Dismantles Barriers for the Sake of All

All four gospels, in one way or another, proclaim that Jesus' ministry is for "all" people, Gentile as well as Jew, rich as well as poor, women as well as men, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or economic status. They reveal God's intention to embrace the whole world, people of every nation and language, every culture and ethnicity, every gender and ability. In radical acts of encounter, Jesus models what it means and looks like to dismantle barriers. In this way, the systems, identities, and power structures that separate people and other them are transformed, and God's love is shared between people and the rest of creation in new and right-relationships.

### Acts

In the Book of Acts, which Justo Gonzalez calls "the Gospel of the Spirit,"<sup>7</sup> Luke continues his post-resurrection narrative in the story of the work of its main character, the Holy Spirit, among the apostles. In this second volume of Luke's gospel, God, through

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<sup>7</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001).

the Spirit, creates ever-widening circles of community according to geography, numbers of believers, ethnicity, and culture,<sup>8</sup> obliterating barriers along the way. Acts 1:8 offers a foreshadowing of the growth of the church as well as an outline of the whole book: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The Spirit comes in Chapter 2, gathering the disciples in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost and visiting them with the roar of a mighty wind and tongues of fire upon their heads (Acts 2:1-4). The rest of the book tells the story of the church’s widening witness at the prompting of the Spirit.

### 1. The Holy Spirit Expands the Church Geographically

From Jerusalem the church expands geographically. Scattered by persecution (Acts 5:17ff; 12:1-2), the disciples are sent into Judea (Acts 8:1) and Samaria (Philip’s ministry, Acts 8:4ff), and then to the ends of the earth (to Africa, via the eunuch, Acts 8:26ff; to Antioch, in Syria, Acts 9:19b-22 and Acts 11:26; to Asia Minor, Acts 13:13ff; and then to Rome, Acts 28:14:ff). At the same time, the church increases numerically: from the eleven disciples plus Matthias (Acts 1:26), to the 120 gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15), to 3,000 converted on the day of Pentecost after which “the Lord [adds] to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:41). As the church experiences persecution, the gospel continues to spread, “to advance and gain adherents” (Acts 12:24).

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew L. Skinner, *Inclusive God, Disruptive Gospel: Encountering the Divine in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 80.

## 2. The Holy Spirit Expands Towards Difference and Diversity

The church also grows in diversity. Its ethnic identity expands from the Jews (Acts 1) and the foreign Jews who heard the gospel in their various tongues on Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11) and Hellenistic Jews, especially the widows (Acts 6:1), to the Samaritans (Acts 8:4ff), to Jewish proselytes such as the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26ff), and finally to the Gentiles (Acts 10:34ff-28:31).

## 3. The Holy Spirit Expands Gender Roles in the Church

The early church's understanding of and practices regarding gender roles also shifts. Neither women nor eunuchs are allowed into the Temple proper in Jerusalem due to their threat of impurity, women by menstruation, and eunuchs by their lack of wholeness in body. In the developing church, however, both women and eunuchs are included. Women are accorded some authority: Dorcas is "devoted to good works and charity" and cares for widows (Acts 9:36); Lydia, "a worshipper of God... [opens] her heart" to Paul's witness and welcomes him into her home (Acts 16:14-16); Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, travels with Paul to Syria (Acts 18:18) and, later to Ephesus, where they meet Apollos and "[explain] the Way of God to him more accurately" (Acts 18:26), and other women finance Paul's missions. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26ff) is the first African convert to the Jesus movement and the first convert who does not fit into the established gender binary; he is baptized by Philip and welcomed into the Jesus community.

## 4. The Holy Spirit Expands Understanding

In many of the stories in Acts, the followers of Jesus, the people of "the Way" (Acts 9:2), experience the movement of the Holy Spirit to propel them beyond the

barriers to which they are accustomed. These include geographical, ethnic, and gender barriers. Over and over again, the Spirit smashes these barriers. In Acts 2, the disciples speak in tongues they do not understand so that “each may hear in [their] own tongue,” an experience that echoes the story of the Tower of Babel in its reversal of Babel’s confusion of languages (Genesis 11:7).

#### 5. The Holy Spirit Expands Paul’s and Peter’s Understandings

In Acts 9, a faithful Jew, confronted by the voice of Jesus (Acts 9:5), is moved beyond the barriers to which he is accustomed. Saul, “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1), is on his way to Damascus, searching for those belonging to “the Way” to “bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2). By the end of the story, he is following Jesus instead of persecuting his followers; he is baptized (Acts 9:18), begins preaching the gospel (Acts 9:20-22), and later receives a new name: Paul (Acts 13:9).

In Acts 10, the Spirit propels a church leader to leap over a familiar and well-established barrier, the “dividing wall” (Ephesians 2:14) between Jew and Gentile. A faithful Jew even as he follows Jesus and leads the church to follow Jesus, Peter initially resists a vision (Acts 10:14) which later pulls him into an encounter not only *with* an unclean Gentile, but *in* that Gentile’s unclean home (Acts 10:24ff). Having moved through several levels of comprehension, Peter finally grasps the vision, saying, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him (Acts 10:34-35).” Just in case Peter is not sure, the Spirit falls “upon all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44-48), and Peter baptizes the

household of Cornelius. Reversing the thrust of God's mission through the Jews to the Gentile nations in the Hebrew Bible, the Spirit now uses a Gentile to witness to a Jew.

In Acts 15, the nascent church makes a painful theological and structural choice to dismantle the barrier between Jews and non-Jews. After an initial embrace of the Gentiles declared by Peter in Acts 13:18 (“Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life”), the community experiences “no small dissension and debate” (Acts 15:2). The church meets in Jerusalem to “consider this matter” (Act 15:6), eventually agreeing that “God... has made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:8-9); Gentiles need not convert to Judaism (i.e., be circumcised) in order to follow Jesus, and, at least according to Paul's account (Galatians 2:7-9), that the gospel mission be divided between Peter (to the Jews) and Paul (to the Gentiles). From this point on in Acts, the narrative shifts to a focus on Paul's missionary journeys by land and sea, as he shares the gospel in and beyond Israel, in communities in modern-day Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, the Mediterranean Islands, and Rome.

Paul begins to live out that impartiality in both theory and praxis. In writing his letter to the Romans, Paul develops his understanding of justification by grace and, in his ministry throughout Asia Minor, puts it into practice in his itinerant ministry to the Gentiles. He claims freedom from devotion to the Jewish law for the Christian movement—and freedom for the pastoral minister to proclaim grace to all of God's people.

And, yet, Paul remains a creature of his culture, of both his Jewish and Roman cultures. On the one hand, he grasps the absolute impartiality of God's love for all, and, on the other, he remains a person of privilege, not only as a man but also as a Roman

citizen (Acts 16:37, 22:25-29, 23:27) and as a member of the Hebrew elite (Philippians 3:4-6). He careens from his egalitarian proclamation in Galatians 3:28 (“There is now no Jew nor Greek, no slave nor free, no man and woman, for all are one in Christ Jesus”) to denigrating comments such as “Women should keep silence in the churches” (I Corinthians 14:34) or “the husband is the head of his wife” (I Corinthians 11:13) or “Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever” (1 Corinthians 7.21). While Paul clearly beholds a vision of a world in which all are one in Christ Jesus regardless of social location, he operates in a world in which there are still distinctions based on faith, economy, and gender, and he cannot escape their limitations.

#### 6. Summary: The Holy Spirit Expands the Movement Ever-Outward

The Spirit continues its work among and through Paul and the other apostles, drawing within the church ever-widening circles of inclusion and reaching outside of the church to welcome into its community increasingly diverse members. The faithful disciples believe that “God shows no partiality, [and that] anyone in every nation” (Acts 10:34) may come to faith in Jesus Christ. While they do not cease to witness to the Jews, they reach outside the community of Israel “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

### **Conclusion**

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures alike point to a God who creates all people in God’s image, a God who celebrates diversity and desires fullness of life for every one of God’s children, a God who calls God’s people to dismantle barriers for the sake of each of God’s people. Even as both traditions seek to set and maintain proper ritual and

social boundaries, their Scriptures are full of examples of crossing borders and dismantling barriers for the sake of God's people.

How preachers choose to interpret these texts matter. We can read Scripture in ways that erect (or, at the least refuse to dismantle) barriers. We can uphold boundaries that protect all of us and reject barriers that exclude others in favor of transformational encounters that preserve dignity and equality across difference for each of our hearers. In this fractious time, it is ever more necessary to name and highlight how Jesus' message of God's grace, forgiveness and love obliterates divisive borders and barriers in order to offer healing to the community. As hearers receive grace, forgiveness and love, they may become more able to extend a welcome across the borders and barriers that divide us today.

CHAPTER 3  
ATTENDING TO SECULAR LITERATURE ON BOUNDARIES, BORDERS, AND  
BARRIERS

Boundaries mark limits, drawing lines between things physically, socially, or symbolically. We begin our literature review with an overview of scholarship on boundaries, barriers, and borders from a few traditional academic disciplines between which there is often overlap. After a brief look survey of Biology and Evolution, Geography and Environment, Developmental Psychology, and Anthropology and Sociology, we examine specific social constructs that set problematic barriers in contemporary society around Gender, Whiteness, Heterosexuality, Able-ness, and Wealth. How might these disciplines guide us in preaching so that we nudge hearers beyond the barriers suggested or set by biological, geographical, psychological, and socio-economic factors?

**Biology and Evolution**

*One of these things is not like the other.  
One of these things just doesn't belong.  
Can you guess which thing is not like the other  
By the time I finish my song?<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Raposo, John Stone, "One of These Things Is Not Like the Other," *The Sesame Street Book and Record*, Columbia Records, 1970, [http://members.tripod.com/Tiny\\_Dancer/one.html](http://members.tripod.com/Tiny_Dancer/one.html).

We human beings are prone to fear what is not “like” us, what we do not know. Our brains are wired to recognize patterns and deviation from patterns and thereby to alert us to “strangeness” or “strangers” in order to protect us from potential dangers. In other words, our brains help establish and maintain boundaries to keep us safe. Chief among the brain’s wiring structures related to fear is the amygdala, a paired structure in the brain’s limbic system, one amygdala being located in the brain’s right hemisphere and one in the left hemisphere.<sup>2</sup>

The limbic system is a group of interconnected structures within the brain which mediates many aspects of motivation, emotion, learning, and memory. Within the limbic system, the amygdala has many functions. Along with processing fear,<sup>3</sup> it is responsible for the “fight-or-flight response,” a physiological reaction to stress in which “hormones... produce well-orchestrated physiological changes” such as increased sweating, heart and breathing rates, and muscle tenseness.<sup>4</sup> This “‘default’ response to uncertainty, novelty, and threat [is] preparation for action; it may [exhibit] ‘negativity bias’—a phenomenon that describes the tendency to prioritize negative over positive information. From an evolutionary perspective, this represents a system that errs on the side of caution—when in doubt, prepare for the worst!—thus maximizing survival and adaptive responses.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Amygdala,” Britannica, accessed 11/2/2019, <https://www.britannica.com/science/amygdala>.

<sup>3</sup> E.A.A. van der Plas, Boes A.D., Wemmie J.A., Tranel D., Nopoulos P., “Amygdala Volume Correlates Positively with Fearfulness in Normal Healthy Girls,” *Soc. Cogn. Affect. Neurosci.* no. 5 (December 2010): 421, [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(11\)00289-2](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(11)00289-2).

<sup>4</sup> “Understanding the Stress Response,” Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, updated 5/1/2018, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>.

<sup>5</sup> R. Nicholas Carleton, “Fear of the Unknown: One Fear to Rule Them All?” *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, Science Direct*, Vol. 41, June 2016, accessed 11/6/2019, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0887618516300469>.

Studies have posited a variety of associations between the amygdala and fear. The size of the amygdala has been correlated with sensitivity to emotions and cognitive styles; a large amygdala may indicate a greater sensitivity to fear, and a small amygdala may be associated with an individual's greater ability to tolerate uncertainty and conflict.<sup>6</sup> Increased amygdala activation may have an important role in the generation of uncertainty-related anxiety or anticipatory anxiety and its consequences.<sup>7</sup>

In our exploration of how we preachers might avoid othering our hearers and, at the same time, offer them healthy approaches to boundaries, we must begin with this biological fact. We are wired to detect difference—and to be wary of it. We are created with a propensity to be cautious and suspicious in the face of encountering something new. We are afraid of the unknown, of what we do not understand, of what we have not yet experienced. In seeking to help hearers cross the barriers that separate them from others, we preachers must attend to the human propensity to form boundaries, barriers, and borders that biology and evolution impose on our brains.

### **Geography and Environment**

Locally, regionally, and nationally, both natural geography and human-built environments set borders which keep us from interacting freely with our neighbors, preventing genuine relationship and causing us to categorize unknown neighbors as other.

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<sup>6</sup> Ryota Kanai, Tom Feilden, Colin Firth, Geraint Rees, “Political Orientations Are Correlated with Brain Structure in Young Adults,” *Current Biology* (4/7/2011), accessed 11/2/2019. [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(11\)00289-2](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(11)00289-2).

<sup>7</sup> LE Williams, *et al.*, “Fear of the Unknown: Uncertain Anticipation Reveals Amygdala Alterations in Childhood Anxiety Disorders,” *Neuropsychopharmacology* (May 2015): 1428-35, doi: 10.1038/npp.2014.328.

In geography, borders separate continents and countries, states and communities.<sup>8</sup> Some of these boundaries (rivers, mountains, oceans, or deserts) occur naturally; others, such as highways, railroads, or border walls, are manufactured by human hands.

Borders separate us on many levels. Local neighborhoods may be segregated by a freeway system or a railroad yard, causing residents to avoid those on “the other side of the tracks.” Regions may be separated by large geographical borders which prevent easy access from one region to the next, or by social barriers such as culture or language.

International barriers such as oceans and border walls divide us from people who speak different languages, eat different foods, and live and work in ways different from ours.

We preachers must explore how we can move beyond—and empower our hearers with resources to move beyond—geographical and human-built environments which fix barriers that keep us separated from others locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

### **Developmental Psychology**

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, psychoanalyst Erik Erikson developed a theory of stages of human growth from birth through death.<sup>9</sup> In each of these stages, he posited, an individual must find a balance—or a resolution of conflict—between two poles, such as

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<sup>8</sup> “Boundary,” National Geographic, accessed 3/15/2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/boundary/>.

<sup>9</sup> Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development include: 1) trust vs. mistrust, 2) autonomy vs. shame/doubt, 3) initiative vs. guilt, 4) industry vs. inferiority, 5) identity vs. role confusion, 6) intimacy vs. isolation, 7) generativity vs. stagnation, and 8) integrity vs. despair. See “Erikson’s 8 Stages of Psychosocial Development,” Lumen, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/teachereducationx92x1/chapter/eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development/>.

initiative and guilt or generativity and stagnation.<sup>10</sup> In 1982, educator Carol Gilligan argued that Erikson's emphasis on separation and individuation in his theory revealed a male bias—and that a study of female development would yield different emphases: on care and relationship.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, we can borrow from Erikson's work an understanding that each person grows through a series of stages during which they navigate their way forward between a set of series of two poles, regardless of gender.

For our purposes in understanding boundaries, Stages One and Six of Erickson's Life Stages are instructive. In Stage One, the infant experiences emotional conflict between basic trust and mistrust. An infant, to grow properly, must develop basic trust in another human being; she must be in relationship and able to trust her caregivers to provide for her basic needs. When she is unable to do so, she cannot flourish. At the same time, she must also learn that she cannot trust all persons in the same way as she does her family. In this stage, she navigates across a boundary of self to develop trust and she holds a boundary around family to keep safe. In Stage Six, the young adult male must find a balance between identity and isolation in order to navigate adulthood. He must find his unique self, and he must find his place in community. In this stage, he sets a boundary around self to establish identity, and he crosses boundaries of family for the sake of establishing relationships.

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<sup>10</sup> Obituary of Erik Erikson, *The New York Times*, 5/13/1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/13/obituaries/erik-erikson-91-psychoanalyst-who-reshaped-views-of-human-growth-dies.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Although most preachers are not trained developmental psychologists, we need a basic understanding of the concept of stages in the lifespan as we preach, administer, and offer pastoral care. Of course, we refer parishioners to professional resources when they are needed. But regardless of our individual expertise, an awareness of the developmental stages in which an individual erects, navigates, and crosses boundaries will assist us to preach in ways that recognize, name and interpret these complexities in Scripture and in human lives.

### **Anthropology and Sociology**

The twin fields of anthropology and sociology are particularly adept at identifying and examining boundaries as they function in human society. Both of these social science disciplines focus on human behavior in a society. The difference, however, is “that sociology focuses on society while anthropology focuses on culture... Sociologists [study] the associations between people and the products of human interaction such as organizations, technologies, economies, cities, culture, media, and religion, while anthropologists observe cross-cultural differences in social institutions, cultural beliefs, and communication styles.”<sup>12</sup>

As anthropologists and sociologists study human culture and society, respectively, they naturally encounter a variety of boundaries between tribes, nations, neighborhoods, people of various socio-economic or educational levels or ethnicities or who speak different languages. Cultural sociologists Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár note two categories of boundaries—symbolic and social. Symbolic boundaries are “conceptual

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<sup>12</sup> Cassandra Ifie, “Anthropology vs. Sociology,” Seattle Pi, accessed 11/12/2019, <https://education.seattlepi.com/anthropology-vs-sociology-1536.html>.

distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality. [They] separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership,”<sup>13</sup> thereby creating a distinction of those who are inside and outside of the group.

“Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifest in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities.”<sup>14</sup> Sociologists and anthropologists study symbolic and social boundaries to observe how groups view, categorize, and interact with or distance themselves from others. They note how boundaries are drawn between the in-group and the out-group and how they are “established, kept or violated, crossed, blurred, or shifted.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Using the perspectives of Biology and Evolution, Geography and Environment, Developmental Psychology, and Anthropology and Sociology, we preachers must become aware of and able to analyze barriers and borders in our personal, familial, congregational, and community lives. Only then can we honor appropriate boundaries, or, upon thoughtful consideration, dismantle outdated or harmful barriers. We must also model such skills for our hearers, in order that they might both recognize, create, and

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<sup>13</sup> Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár cite CF Epstein (“Tinker-bells and Pinups: The Construction and Reconstruction of Gender Boundaries at Work,” Lamont and Fournier 1992, 232-56) in their article, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 168, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107>.

<sup>14</sup> Lamont and Molnár, “Study of Boundaries,” 170.

<sup>15</sup> Lamont and Molnár, 185-187.

maintain their own healthy boundaries and dismantle harmful barriers for the sake of the gospel. Part of the task of pastoral ministry is to discern and help the congregation discern the difference.

CHAPTER 4  
ATTENDING TO THEOLOGICAL VOICES ON POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND  
PURITY

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. (Romans 12:3)*

In this section we attend to theologians who explore boundaries of power, privilege, and purity. First, we hear from Walter Wink about power. Next, we listen to a variety of voices about privilege. Finally, we hear from L. William Countryman about purity.

**Power**

In his *Powers Trilogy: Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*,<sup>1</sup> *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence*,<sup>2</sup> and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*,<sup>3</sup> which I briefly outline below, Walter Wink explores the New Testament

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

concept of “the principalities and powers,”<sup>4</sup> seeking theological language to engage the problem of evil in contemporary society. He asks, “How can we oppose evil without creating new evils and being made evil ourselves?”<sup>5</sup>

In volume I, *Naming the Powers*, Wink identifies the Powers (which he always capitalizes) as “inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of Power.”<sup>6</sup> The New Testament names these Powers as rulers, authorities, spirits, thrones, and dominions, for example. Wink offers examples of Powers: capitalism, public institutions, racism, church, and patriotism.

Wink posits that every Power has both visible, outer, material forms, and invisible, inner, spiritual forms. While they may act positively or negatively, for good or ill, none is inherently good or evil. Wink recognizes the capacity of each Power to be idolatrous because it has its own spirit and tendency to preserve itself.<sup>7</sup> He identifies the church’s task: “to unmask this idolatry and recall the Powers to their created purposes in the world.”<sup>8</sup> Certainly the dynamic of othering people who are different from us is one of the Powers we are to “unmask [as] idolatry.”

In volume II, *Unmasking the Powers*, Wink points to our inability to communicate God’s good news meaningfully within our prevailing modern materialistic cosmology.

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<sup>4</sup> Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 5. This phrase is used in the KJV translations of Romans 8:38; Ephesians 3:10, 6:12, Colossians 1:16, 2:15; and Titus 3:1; the NRSV translates them as “rulers and authorities.”

<sup>5</sup> Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Wink, 135-137.

<sup>8</sup> Wink, 5.

He proposes instead a new, postmaterialist cosmology in which we might “reclaim, name, and comprehend types of experiences that materialism renders mute and inexpressible,”<sup>9</sup> incorporating both inner and outer, both spiritual and material aspects of reality. This new cosmology can provide a framework to identify the “background belief of the age,”<sup>10</sup> the unexamined assumptions which have power over us. Wink argues that this new cosmology must take into account “the intractability of evil.”<sup>11</sup> We must recognize that evil is a part of the world, and a part of us. For the purposes of this study, we must recognize that social constructs such as patriarchy, white privilege, and heterosexism are “part of the world, and part of us.”

In volume III, *Engaging the Powers*, Wink offers analysis of the “Domination System” that pervades modern life. In Chapter 4, he notes, “The Powers are good; the Powers are fallen; the Powers will be redeemed.”<sup>12</sup> He further notes that we humans, too, are good and fallen and in need of redemption—and that we must be aware of our own capacity for evil, rejecting “the need to locate all evil outside ourselves.”<sup>13</sup> He writes, “We must not engage the Powers without rigorous examination of our own inner evil.... We must ask how we are like the very Power we oppose and attempt to open these parts of ourselves to divine transformation.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, he argues, “Transformation comes not

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<sup>9</sup> Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Wink, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Wink, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Wink, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 130.

through the denial and repression of our evil, but by naming it, owning it, and lifting it up to Christ.”<sup>15</sup> Then “[e]ven our mistakes and wrong choices can become the catalysts of our transformation.”<sup>16</sup> As we recognize, confess, and lift up the mistakes we have made and the harm we have done to others whether intentionally or unintentionally, Christ transforms us to live more justly and righteously, sending us to reach out to those in need of welcome.

Martin Niemoller, a Lutheran pastor, experienced such transformation when he confessed his own evil, recognizing that, in his support of Hitler and his concern to preserve the German Lutheran church, he had failed to stand up for the victims of Nazism. Later he joined Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others in founding the “Confessing Church,” which opposed Hitler’s actions. Niemoller writes:

No, we are not criminals, we have murdered no one, we have not lustfully and intentionally tortured; but also, we no longer think ourselves superior to those people who have done such things, because we know of our own guilt, and, in the midst of this guilt, we know of the one great wonder, the mercy of God in giving us his only-begotten Son.<sup>17</sup>

Niemoller and Wink remind us “not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought” (Romans 12:3), to recognize that, just as the Powers, so are we: good and fallen and redeemable. We can act as God’s people, we can do God’s work only as God redeems and empowers us, but never by our own efforts or our own goodness. By God’s power, we can confront and resist the Powers; we can speak against modern-day Nazism,

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<sup>15</sup> Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Wink, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Niemoller, “Christianity and Crisis,” from a letter addressed to one of his critics, November 1945, in *For All the Saints*, Vol. 1, ed. Frederick J. Schumacher (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994), 774-775.

patriarchy or white supremacy; we can work for justice. But we cannot possibly resist the Powers by a pretense of our own goodness or our own ability to confront evil. Lutheran theologian Arthur Piepkorn boldly proclaims:

The Gospel of our redemption is the Gospel in its most abrasive and scandalous and uncomfortable and offensive form. It is the Gospel of the incarnation, of God becoming a human being. It is the Gospel of deliverance, with its disconcerting reminder of something we pridefully prefer not to ponder—that we were natively slaves, human animals in the thrall of the demonic power, unable to free ourselves, needing to be freed by someone else, and actually freed by his death.<sup>18</sup>

Unable to free ourselves, we confess our sins and are freed by Jesus' death. Among our sins is our inability to recognize the privileges we hold, our utter ignorance of the privileges granted by patriarchy, whiteness, heterosexism, able-ness, and wealth.

### **Privilege**

Privilege is an earned or unearned individual or systemic benefit over someone else which puts them or their group at an advantage. A queen, by virtue of her inheritance, title, and role receives the privilege of directing her subjects to do her will. A college graduate earns a diploma and (traditionally, at least) receives the accompanying privilege of an entrée into the working world. A CEO, through her position, gains privileges of wealth, access to accountants and lawyers and tax advisors, a fine house in a gated neighborhood, and extravagant vacations.

Privilege may be held inherently, born into, granted, or earned. But there is never an equal playing field. Some have privilege, and some do not. And even those who earn their privilege (such as graduates or those who pass a bar exam) have other privileges

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<sup>18</sup> Arthur Piepkorn, "Chapel Sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation," March 25, 1971 in *For All the Saints*, Vol. 1, ed. Frederick J. Schumacher (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994), 324.

handed to them. The queen began life as a princess, with no effort on her part. The CEO, who probably worked long hours, most likely began life with unearned privileges of wealth, good education, and access to those already in power.

Privilege is always linked with power. The queen, at least historically, holds the power of life or death over her subjects. The college graduate has economic power, as more education leads (at least traditionally and historically) to more lucrative job opportunities. The CEO has power to hire, fire, promote or demote, reorganize the company, and put thousands out of jobs.

Since the early 1960's, groups within the U.S. who have experienced oppression have fought for their rights, recognizing that those who other them hold unearned privilege which grants them power over others, particularly marginalized groups. One by one, each of these groups have protested for—and sometimes won—their rights.

African-Americans fought for their rights in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Women fought for their rights in the Women's Liberation Movements of the 1960's and 1970's. The Poor People's Campaign of 1968 sought to gain economic justice for people living in poverty. The Stonewall Riot in 1969 was the beginning of the Gay Rights Movement. It later included people identifying as lesbian, transgender, or bisexual who also sought rights commensurate with those of other Americans, for fair housing, employment, and marriage. The differently-abled community fought for their rights, their efforts culminating in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990.

In our fraught history as humans, people who are men, people who are white, people who are heterosexual, people who live without disabilities, and people who have

wealth have taken and/or enjoyed the benefits of privilege without earning it, by virtue of their maleness, whiteness, heterosexuality, ability, and/or socio-economic level. This is true whether or not such a person chooses their privilege or recognizes it.

Boundaries, whether borders or barriers, physical or social or symbolic, are always drawn by those who have privilege against those who lack privilege. Boundaries are maintained and barriers are erected by those who have power both to maintain their power and to disempower those considered as other or “lesser.” We now examine the dynamics of privilege and power through the lens of social constructs that grant privilege to some and not to others.

### Social Constructs

A social construct is a concept that, literally, has been constructed by society, a made-up idea or system. Examples of social constructs are government, games, money, family, gender, race, and fashion. Often social constructs involve binaries such as good/evil, right/wrong, or male/female. Because they are constructed, made from scratch, so to speak, they can be un-made; they can be de-constructed.

Let’s take a look at left- and right-handedness as example. Handedness is the preference for the dominant hand, the less preferred hand being non-dominant. Almost everyone favors one hand over the other, so handedness itself is a biological fact rather than a social construct. But the understanding of right-handedness *as superior to* left-handedness is not a fact; it’s a social construct. Because the great majority of people are right-handed, right-handedness has come to be seen as the norm, and those outside the norm, those who are left-handed, are considered as others. The Latin terms designating right- and left-handedness, for example, are heavily value-laden. A person who is right-

handed is *dexter*, as in “dexterity” and “dexterous.” A person who is left-handed is *sinistra*, as in “sinister.” Left-handedness came to be associated with words such as “evil,” “unlucky,” “awkward,” and “dishonest.” Tools, such as scissors, were made for the right-handers, and those who were left-handed were expected to adjust. School children were required to learn to write with their right hands or face the consequences.

While right- or left-handedness is biologically determined, the norming of right-handedness is a social construct. Today, thankfully, that social construct is slowly being replaced by one in which handedness is value-less, in which left-handed implements are widely available, and in which schoolchildren are encouraged to write with the hand that feels natural to them. The social construct of right-handedness as good and superior is being unmade; it is being de-constructed. These days, for example, Major League Baseball teams intentionally seek left-handed pitchers for their rosters.

In order to preach in ways that do not other our hearers, we preachers need to grapple with the concept of social constructs, their role in granting privilege, and how to deconstruct them. Further, we need to identify our own power and privilege and the ways they blind us to the systemic “-isms” and cries for justice from women, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQIA2, people who experience disability, and people living in poverty. We now examine the concept of privilege through the lens of social constructs; we do so considering how we might deconstruct constructs of patriarchy, whiteness, heterosexuality, ability, and wealth, which grant privilege only to some.

#### Male Privilege as Barrier

In the history of the U.S., men have held a dominant role in family and in society. Walter Wink identifies this male supremacy as “the cultural context of all

relationships,”<sup>19</sup> in which “power lost by men [is] compensated by power gained over women and children,”<sup>20</sup> Sociologist Allan G. Johnson, in *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, notes that for men the “Great Lie [is] that the answer to life’s needs is disconnection, competition, and control rather than connection, sharing, and cooperation.”<sup>21</sup> This lie goads men to find meaning and value only in domination and control over others, and it sets up the patriarchal system in which everyone is driven by a need for power and control over others.

Only in the last hundred years have women had resources to confront patriarchy in the domestic and public spheres. Not until 1919 did American women first win the right to vote with the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.<sup>22</sup> In the 1940’s, during World War II, they took the place of men who had left factories to serve in the war effort. In taking on this responsibility, they inadvertently gained the privilege of working outside the home. In the 1960’s they gained the possibility of birth control and, in 1973, the right to abortion in *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>23</sup> In the 1970’s they began to step into roles traditionally held by men only, such as doctors, lawyers, professors, and religious leaders. While great strides have been made (suffrage, reproductive rights, Title IX, efforts toward an Equal Rights Amendment, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, and the #MeToo Movement), our

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<sup>19</sup> Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Wink, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, Third Edition (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2014), 52.

<sup>22</sup> “United States of America 1789 (rev. 1992),” *Constitute*, accessed 3/31/2020, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United\\_States\\_of\\_America\\_1992](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_States_of_America_1992).

<sup>23</sup> “*Roe v. Wade*,” *Oyez*, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/70-18>.

patriarchal culture hangs on to male privilege and power, with institutions preferencing men and individual men subjugating women to their own purposes.

While women certainly bear the burden of the privilege wielded by men, there are others, too, who suffer from the effects of patriarchy. Individuals who identify as transgender, gender-queer, or non-binary find themselves outside the gender-binary but not outside patriarchal culture. The most insidious effect of patriarchy, the “male gaze,” which harms women, also harms these others. In the “male gaze,” a woman (or a person who is transgender, gender-queer, or non-binary) is “seen” only in relationship with a man or through a man’s eyes. She lacks the luxury of seeing herself through her own gaze, of finding her own identity, of making her own choices. I expand on this topic of gender and gender identity in Chapter 5.

#### White Privilege as Barrier

As men have dominated women, white women have come to dominate women and men of color, who have less power than they. The system of patriarchy grants white privilege to women who are white, offering them dominion over people of color, women and men alike. This dominion both creates and maintains both privilege and power. According to educator and journalist, Cory Collins, white privilege affords a person with white skin three powers: 1) the Power of Normal; 2) the Power of the Benefit of the Doubt; and 3) the Power of Accumulated Power.<sup>24</sup> I now draw upon Collins’ work to

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<sup>24</sup> Cory Collins, “What is White Privilege, Really?” *Teaching Tolerance*, Issue 60, Fall 2018, <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>.

highlight how white privilege functions as a barrier, adding a fourth power: the Power to Name and Maintain the Privilege of Whiteness.

### 1. The Power of Normal

White is the “normal” and “norm-ing” color for skin. The system of white supremacy functions so that white people are deemed the “the standard,” against which people of color are deemed other—and thus suspect. A person with white skin accused of committing a crime is not likely to be identified as “white” in news reports, while a person with black or brown skin is likely to have their skin color noted. Even the term “people of color,” meant to honor and identify people of various skin colors and ethnic heritages, literally means “people who are not white”—and thus not “normal.” The ELCA, the mostly “white” denomination in which I serve, has affinity groups for LatinX, Asian, African-descent, Arab, and Native American members (the ELCA members who are “not-white”), but the whole church, an institution in which white privilege is powerful but unseen, acts as an affinity group for “whites.” Institutions such as the ELCA, with European roots and thus a heritage of white privilege, are little aware of the barriers in the system which delineate who is “out” and who is “in,” but systemic racism becomes visible in statistics comparing access to interviews or second calls or opportunities for advancement among pastors of color and pastors who are white.

### 2. The Power of the Benefit of the Doubt

There are many ways in which white people receive the benefit of the doubt over people of color. These include, but are not limited to: seeing themselves represented in the media in positive ways, being allowed an individual identity apart from their skin color, not being expected to represent the entire white population because they are white,

entering a store without worrying about whether or not they will be followed by a salesperson, encountering a traffic stop and not needing to wonder if their rights will be violated or if their lives will be in danger, and not being subjected to microaggressions because of the color of their skin.

### 3. The Power of Accumulated Power

White privilege is a “purposeful result of racism... that allow[s] for the constant re-creation of inequality,”<sup>25</sup> whereby white people who have power get more power and people of color, in the main, lose whatever power they have. Certainly there are powerful, wealthy Americans who are of Asian, African, Hispanic, or Native descent, but the widening gap between rich and poor shows that whites are growing richer and people of color are growing poorer. The percentage of people living in poverty in the U.S. is 14%, but rates are generally higher among people of color. Of Americans of Asian descent, 11.6% live in poverty; of Hispanic descent, 21.0%; of African descent, 24.2%; and of Native descent, 25.8%<sup>26</sup>—this when the population is 5.9% Asian descent, 18.3% Latino, 13.4% African descent, and 1.3% Native descent.<sup>27</sup> The white poverty rate is 14%,<sup>28</sup> while the white percentage of U.S. population is 76.9%.<sup>29</sup> Of the “one-percent” (top 1%

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<sup>25</sup> Collins, “What Is White Privilege?”

<sup>26</sup> “Maps and Data: Demographics Poverty by Race,” Poverty USA, accessed 3/20/2020, <https://www.povertyusa.org/data>.

<sup>27</sup> “Quick Facts: Demographics, Race and Hispanic Origin,” United States Census Bureau, accessed 3/20/2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/RHI125218>.

<sup>28</sup> “Maps and Data,” Poverty USA.

<sup>29</sup> “Quick Facts,” United States Census Bureau.

in income in the U.S.), 1.4% are African-American, while 96.2% are white.”<sup>30</sup> Collins cites “the past and present context of wealth inequality [as an example] of white privilege,” which he explains as white people having “greater access to power and resources than people of color [in the same situation] do.”<sup>31</sup>

Among these privileges for whites are inheriting wealth at greater rates and for more generations, the capacity to support their children (providing enrichment and extra-curricular activities) and their young adult children (giving them a step “up” with education, housing, and transportation), access to better loan rates, and the mortgage interest deduction (a “public housing benefit”).

#### 4. The Power to Name and Maintain the Privilege of Whiteness

To Collins’ “Powers of Whiteness,” I would add the “Power to Name and Maintain the Boundaries of Whiteness.” Even “whiteness” itself is defined by white people, and the definition has shifted dramatically over the years. In apartheid-era South Africa, Asians were considered “honorary whites.” In the U.S., over time, Italians, Irish, and Arabs, who were once identified as non-white, are now considered “white.” And, in regard to skin, “whiteness” means nothing. No one actually has “white” skin—or, for that matter, “black” or “brown” or “red” or “yellow” skin.

A thorough study of “whiteness” and “race” in the United States requires attention to historical and contemporary conditions such as slavery, emancipation, reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s, the Black Lives Matter

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<sup>30</sup> “Who Are The Black ‘1 Percent’?” The Grio, accessed 3/20/2020, <https://thegrio.com/2011/11/21/who-are-the-black-1-percent/>.

<sup>31</sup> Collins, “What Is White Privilege?”

Movement of the 2010's, and the current prison industrial complex, a span far beyond our capacity in this study. For our purposes, we recognize, with Lamont and Molnár, that “whiteness” is simply “a nonsalient, taken-for-granted, hegemonic racial category”<sup>32</sup> which draws boundaries against people of color, naming them in the minority, as abnormal, as other—and privileges white people, giving them unearned benefits.

### Heterosexual Privilege as Barrier

Since its inception, U.S. society has operated according to binary understandings of gender and sexuality. The dominant (and therefore privileged) form of gender identity has been male/female. The dominant form of sexuality has been heterosexuality, the practice of sexual attraction and relationship between persons of two different genders (i.e., a woman and a man). Identity or practice outside the binary of two (and only two) distinct genders, and heterosexuality has generally been shamed, condemned, and even outlawed or punished. There are exceptions in Native American tribes; in some of these, “Two-Spirit” members who crossed gender barriers were accepted and accorded honor.<sup>33</sup>

Over the past fifty years in the United States, beginning with the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City, continuing through the AIDS crisis in the 1980's, and culminating in marriage equality in 2015, gay men have fought for rights for their community. Much of this fight has been focused on dismantling barriers to guarantee privileges that people who are heterosexual take for granted. Even as the wider society erected barriers against them, the gay community itself expanded its mission to include

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<sup>32</sup> Lamont and Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries,” 175.

<sup>33</sup> Harlan Pruden, “UBC TEFA Talks Two Spirit,” You Tube, presented 10/26/2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Tb07GDNpow>.

people who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or transgender—and, more recently, people who identify as queer (or questioning), intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirit. This expansion has necessitated language that is more inclusive. Currently, people in this community may describe themselves as LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA2, the term I have chosen to use in this project. Each of these terms is used by different members to name an inclusive category of anyone whose gender identity is not binary and/or whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual. There are some in this community who, perhaps addressing the clumsiness of the alphabet letters, have reclaimed the once-derogatory term “queer” as an umbrella term for their identity and their community.

What sorts of rights has this community sought? Among the privileges denied them were: marriage, sharing a name, entering a spouse’s hospital room, adopting a child, securing fair housing and employment, and receiving an inheritance upon a spouse’s death. For many years, and even now, in some states, people who identify as LGBTQIA2 do not receive such rights as a matter of course. And even LGBTQIA2 couples who have legal rights may not have social privileges such as displaying a picture of a loved one on a desk at work, showing pictures of their children, or receiving support when one of them is ill or when they are both recovering from an auto accident.

#### Abled Privilege as Barrier

The World Health Organization defines disability as the condition of having “impairments, activity limitations, or participation restrictions”<sup>34</sup> in body or mind which

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<sup>34</sup> “Disabilities,” World Health Organization, accessed 3/15/2020, <https://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>.

become significant in interaction with features of society. Those who are able-bodied bear their abled privilege without thinking about the variety of challenges faced by people who live with disability. Those who live with disability have to think about and figure out how to overcome their impairments every day whenever they...

- encounter a lack of physical access (to public transportation, air travel, recreational venues, parks, or housing), when they have to plan how to get through everyday activities (dressing, bathroom, etc.), when they need special accommodations;
- endure chronic pain; when they experience inability to perform daily tasks and must ask for help, when they are denied access to leisure activities such as sports, knitting, woodworking, gardening, etc.;
- experience others' low expectations of their ability, when their employment opportunities are limited, when they lose employment due to unexpressed and/or thoughtless job discrimination, when people assume that the employment they do have is not based on their ability;
- find themselves portrayed in media and literature as "lacking" rather than as having gifts to share in community;
- hear jokes or other fun-making at their expense, in daily life or in the media, when they must worry about others' reactions to their able-ness, and when they are excluded from or don't know if they will be included in group activities.<sup>35</sup>

Whether their disability is located in the body (due to illness, injury, or congenital conditions, etc.) or in the mind (due to brain diseases, brain trauma, mental illness, or congenital conditions, etc.), and regardless of their level of ability, people who live with disability of one sort or another have other abilities that they can contribute to society. Preachers can help hearers define people who live with disability not by what they cannot do, but by what they *can* do, and who they are.

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<sup>35</sup> Shannon Ridgway, "19 Examples of Ability Privilege," 3/5/2013, <https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/03/19-examples-of-ability-privilege/>

## Wealth Privilege as Barrier

*Crossing a single street transformed the way people talked,  
determined the size and condition of their home,  
the dimension and character of their dreams.<sup>36</sup>*

*For [the needy, the poor, the widows, the fatherless] his anger is not  
turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. (Isaiah 10:4b)*

In human history and in current human reality, differences in economic levels create barriers between one individual and another, and among various social classes. Sometimes these barriers are physical, as when a highway is planned to divide a thriving central-city community and then causes—or at least contributes to—its economic decline. Sometimes they are financial, as in the case of redlining, when a bank strategizes to isolate African-Americans into certain neighborhoods by their inequitable practices, for example, the blocking of bids for property in such white neighborhoods and/or the allocation of mortgage loans at higher interest rates for applicants of color than their white counterparts.

In the United States today, citizens and immigrants alike tend to divide themselves, or are divided by racist housing policies or bank policies, into neighborhoods of people of similar economic status. No longer is there a lawyer's three-bedroom house next to a school teacher's bungalow next to an apartment building for people working in a meat-packing plant. Neighborhood borders are easily identified by the changes in quality of housing and size of housing lots; we can quickly see where the borders are drawn and who is on which "side of the tracks." Not only are wealthy, middle class, and poor residents segregated into neighborhoods with people of similar economic status, but

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<sup>36</sup> Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (New York: Doubleday, 2016), 170.

the “one-percent” live in places where they are isolated and insulated from the other “ninety-nine-percent.”

### **Power and Privilege: The Dynamics of Othering**

Given our biological formation, our developmental processes, our anthropological history, and our social constructs, we humans have the propensity to take whatever power and privilege we possess or can grasp to bless and honor ourselves at the expense of those who are different, identifying “our kind” as good and right and those others as bad and wrong—essentially as other. In fact, we construct identities that keep those like us “in” and those who are different from us “out,” including those who are like us in skin color, ethnicity, national heritage, and language, affiliating with those of similar political outlook or socio-economic status or educational level, hanging around those who are similar in gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or sexual expression, honoring those who are wealthy or educated or properly “abled,” and disparaging those who are poor or illiterate or “disabled.”

How can we preachers, who have our own penchant for hanging around those who are like us, address the dynamic of othering, offer correctives for our tendency to focus on difference, and deconstruct our privilege? How can we invite hearers to embrace others as fellow believers gathered at Jesus’ table? Hearing the good news that God has adopted us (Galatians 4:4), we can begin to accept ourselves as children of God (I John 3:1-2), beloved of God (Romans 1:17, 9:25; Ephesians 5:1; Colossians 3:12), and creatures made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), and we can begin to see one another as siblings in God’s family. Only then can we go out into the world together to witness the

encompassing love of God for all of God’s creation—and invite our neighbors into the community of God’s people, where all are welcome.

### **Purity**

*“Pure Flix” advertises itself as “a Netflix for families of faith,” offering “Christ-centered movies... for family entertainment that can change the culture for Christ, one heart at a time.”<sup>37</sup>*

The notion of purity, whether biological, religious, sexual, or cinematic, functions as a boundary<sup>38</sup> to keep “dirt” and “dirty” people out. In *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*,<sup>39</sup> L. William Countryman, a New Testament scholar and Episcopal priest who is gay, explores purity systems in Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as follows. “Dirt is what lies outside the system, what is perceived as not belonging in association with people of this particular society, whether as unfamiliar, irregular, unhealthy, or otherwise objectionable.”<sup>40</sup> He references British social anthropologist Mary Douglas, who suggests, “purity systems function in society by making of the human body a kind of symbol for the society in which the person lives, with body boundaries standing for social boundaries.”<sup>41</sup>

Countryman notes differences between purity systems among cultures:

What is clean in one culture is dirty in another... What is consistent from one culture to another is that purity rules relate to the boundaries of the human body,

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<sup>37</sup> “Pure Flix: Your Home for Faith-Filled Movies,” Pure Flix, accessed 1/28/20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyljR-HhL84>.

<sup>38</sup> In this section, I use “boundary” as Countryman and Douglas do, to describe an invisible religious and/or cultural line drawn to delineate purity.

<sup>39</sup> L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Countryman, *Dirt*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> Countryman, 16.

especially to its orifices. This means that whatever passes these boundaries has particular importance for purity: foods, waste products, shed blood, menstrual blood, sexual emissions, sexual acts, birth, death.<sup>42</sup>

I now examine Countryman's interpretation of purity boundaries in ancient Israel, in the early church, and in the gospels to assess how Jesus crosses these boundaries to foster healing and connection.

### Purity Boundaries in Ancient Israel

Ancient Israel, Countryman posits, separated itself "from other ethnic groups and perpetuated its identity from generation to generation"<sup>43</sup> by means of the law with "its intense concern with purity."<sup>44</sup> Chapters 11-16 in Leviticus legislate rites of purification for individual uncleanness, while Chapters 17-26 deal with uncleanness among the people and their purification by the removal of offenders. The first code sees "dirt as an inevitable aspect of daily existence... and offers remedies, [while the second demands] an absolute separation between Israel and all that is unclean."<sup>45</sup>

Countryman again refers to Mary Douglas for a rationale for Israel's purity system:

God's holiness, for the authors of Leviticus, means wholeness and completeness, not only in God, but in God's creation. ... Israelite attention to "wholeness" demands two things: first, that every individual should be a complete and self-contained specimen of its kind... and, second, that there should be no mixing of kinds.... Any breach in the ideal wholeness of a being or of its place in ordinary

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<sup>42</sup> Countryman, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Countryman, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Countryman, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Countryman, 23.

processes thus occasions a diminution of its perfection.” (Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 41-57)<sup>46</sup>

For example, the “male who fulfills the ‘female’ role [i.e., a homosexual male] is a combination of kinds and therefore unclean,”<sup>47</sup> and “certain social roles... stand in such contradiction to one another” that they cannot be combined—as the roles of son and sexual rival.<sup>48</sup>

While purity is a significant concern in ancient Israel, not every law is a purity law, however; some laws have other origins. For example, sexual acts considered in the purity codes (i.e., adultery, prostitution, and incest) contain elements of property law as well as purity law.<sup>49</sup> This understanding becomes significant as Countryman later considers sexual ethics for contemporary Christians.

First-century Jewish sects evidenced much variety in their attention to purity. The priestly Sadducees kept “a higher standard than others,”<sup>50</sup> partly because they frequented the Temple, which they believed had to be protected from impurity. The Essenes, dispossessed priests who were separated from the Temple, were also “committed to a high level of purity...[and excluded people such as] the mad, the simple, the maimed, [and] those with a visible blemish.”<sup>51</sup> The Pharisees, lay legal experts who kept Torah, particularly its laws about table fellowship, had little interest in laws which did not

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<sup>46</sup> Countryman, 24-26.

<sup>47</sup> Countryman, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Countryman, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Countryman, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Countryman, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Countryman, 49.

originate in purity concerns (i.e., “wizardry, incest, or homosexual actions”).<sup>52</sup> Due to their insistence on table purity, they judged the ordinary “people of the land” as unclean<sup>53</sup>—because, as dirty “sinners,” they did not bother to keep Torah.

### Purity Boundaries in the Early Church

#### 1. Significance of Purity Boundaries in the Early Church

Since purity was a significant concept in ancient Israel, it also became such for the early church. Countryman identifies it as “a critical subject for... early Christians,”<sup>54</sup> evidenced in interactions between Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. Peter is clean. He keeps the law, including the food laws, which is why he resists the food offered in his vision. Cornelius does not keep the law, he does not keep kosher, and he is uncircumcised. In a word, he is unclean, impure. At Caesarea, the battle is drawn: How can we law-abiding Jews sit at table with unclean Gentiles?

#### 2. Challenge to Law-Abiding Jews: Cross Purity Boundaries

Countryman notes the difficulty that followers of Jesus who keep the law have in welcoming unclean Gentiles at their tables. Insisting on observing “the whole Torah... was by no means an irrational or narrowly partisan demand on their part,”<sup>55</sup> he explains, since the

addition of true Gentiles to the community created a serious problem about the relationship of believers to one another in terms of the purity of their food... No

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<sup>52</sup> Countryman, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Countryman, 55-57.

<sup>54</sup> Countryman, 66.

<sup>55</sup> Countryman, 70.

one had yet explained exactly how clean Jews and unclean Gentiles were to coexist in a single community and share the same table. The problem was both genuine and serious.

The church had no idea how to navigate this conflict, but no matter, since “Luke presents the turn to the Gentiles as being the result of divine guidance, not human planning.”<sup>56</sup>

### 3. How Can Purity Law Be Abrogated?

Countryman identifies “the insistence of the Spirit [as the only thing that] could lead the early church to break the ultimate boundary of purity and accept unclean Gentiles into their community. Yet they did so, under that conviction that any other course of action would violate the fundamental reality of God’s grace,”<sup>57</sup> understanding that,

God gives salvation, accordingly, by grace, not waiting for the perfect fulfillment of the Torah [and making salvation] available now to Gentiles in the same free way as to Jews. If any further condition were applied to them, ... it would imply that the grace of the Lord Jesus was not sufficient by itself.<sup>58</sup>

This “insistence of the Spirit” persists today, nudging the church to transcend new “purity” boundaries that keep us apart.

## Purity in the Gospels

### 1. Purity and Rejection of Purity in the Gospels

Countryman notes disparate approaches to purity in each gospel but identifies a common element: all four reject purity as a condition for salvation. “Matthew and Mark

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<sup>56</sup> Countryman, 76.

<sup>57</sup> Countryman, 77.

<sup>58</sup> Countryman, 75-76.

represent Jesus as having dismissed the issue of food purity during his ministry”<sup>59</sup> (Matthew 15:1-20/ Mark 7: 1-23), but Luke represents Jesus both as “remaining within the prescribed limits of purity [and] as foreshadowing later developments by his open treatment of Gentiles and of the impure within Israel itself.”<sup>60</sup>

John is the only one of the New Testament writers who “portrays Jesus himself as administering purification rites, consisting of baptism (John 3:22; 4:1-2) and foot washing (John 13:1-17).”<sup>61</sup> Jesus uses impure vessels to convey the gospel: “birth (John 3:3-8), [which] renders a woman unclean, [baptism, waters of birth which] convey not impurity but intimate association with God,”<sup>62</sup> and himself as bread (John 6) on which he invites his disciples to “chew” on him, in spite of the Torah’s injunction against consuming blood (Leviticus 17:10-12). In John, “impure things have become, for Christians, the means of approach to God,”<sup>63</sup> of intimate association with God.

## 2. According to Jesus, A New Kind of Purity: Intent

In all four gospels, Jesus lifts up a “metaphorical kind of purity or impurity, consisting of the intent to do good or to do harm. [The problem is not about following rules but about failing] to be equally attentive to the claims of justice and love.”<sup>64</sup>

Matthew’s Jesus “avoids uncleanness, reaffirms Torah, heeds the Pharisees, is not like

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<sup>59</sup> Countryman, 68.

<sup>60</sup> Countryman, 81.

<sup>61</sup> Countryman, 92.

<sup>62</sup> Countryman, 93.

<sup>63</sup> Countryman, 94.

<sup>64</sup> Countryman, 82.

Gentiles, and confines the ministry of the Twelve to the Jews,”<sup>65</sup> yet he prefers the company of impure tax collectors and sinners. Teaching a new purity, of the heart, he condemns not the observance of the law, but, rather, “the tendency to substitute [the law] for “the weightier matters” of judgment and mercy and faith.”<sup>66</sup> Mark’s Jesus replaces physical purity with [a] metaphorical purity of intent.”<sup>67</sup> In chapter 7, he sets “aside not only the purity concerns related to washing, but the whole category of physical purity and impurity.”<sup>68</sup>

New Testament authors largely reject “physical purity... as an authoritative ethic;”<sup>69</sup> instead, they begin with “purity of the heart, [a] willingness to respect and unwillingness to harm the neighbor,”<sup>70</sup> modeled in Jesus’ choice to be “least and weakest, [dying in] love and humility.”<sup>71</sup> Jesus welcomes these least and weakest in “the leper, the menstruant, the uncircumcised Gentile, indeed all the unclean without exception,”<sup>72</sup> because he “has no fear of contamination, but rather dominates uncleanness through his own power.”<sup>73</sup> The real dirt, for Jesus, is “not of specific foods or sexual acts or of

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<sup>65</sup> Countryman, 88.

<sup>66</sup> Countryman, 91.

<sup>67</sup> Countryman, 83.

<sup>68</sup> Countryman, 85.

<sup>69</sup> Countryman, 138.

<sup>70</sup> Countryman, 140.

<sup>71</sup> Countryman, 140.

<sup>72</sup> Countryman, 142.

<sup>73</sup> Countryman, 86.

leprosy or corpses, but of arrogance, greed, and other sins of social oppression or disruption.”<sup>74</sup>

### 3. Jesus Crosses Purity Boundaries

All four gospels agree that, for Christians, physical purity is “no longer a determinative element in their relationship with God [because Jesus has broken] the age-old link between physical purity and access to God. [While practicing purity is not condemned,] exaltation of one’s own religious excellence at the expense of others” is.<sup>75</sup> In the framework of this study, Jesus has erased the connection between physical purity and access to God, obliterating the barriers that kept others out of the Temple. In order to welcome all, he now enlists his people to walk with him beyond those barriers.

### Conclusion

Preachers must take into account our own power, privilege, and desire for purity as well as the dynamics of power, privilege, and purity systems in the congregation and in the world. We must recognize that power is unequally distributed in our communities, that privilege (patriarchy, whiteness, heterosexuality, ability, and wealth) grants access only to some, and that purity systems stand ready to other anyone outside the norm, even without our awareness. As we hold power and privilege and may be seen as guardians of purity, we must be aware of these dynamics at work in the system and help the congregation, through the preached word, to navigate them.

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<sup>74</sup> Countryman, 124.

<sup>75</sup> Countryman, 94-95.

## CHAPTER 5

### PREACHING SO HEARERS CAN HEAR

#### **Preaching to Embrace Hearers Toward Transformation**

*This is a test of... true Christian community. Has the fellowship served to make the individual free, strong, and mature, or... weak and dependent? Has it taken him by the hand for a while in order that he may learn again to walk by himself, or has it made him uneasy and unsure? ... [Has it] led him into a real contact with God[?] Has it transported him for a moment into a spiritual ecstasy that vanishes when everyday life returns, or has it lodged the Word of God so securely and deeply in his heart that it holds and fortifies him, impelling him to active love, to obedience, to good works?<sup>1</sup>*

In the first four chapters, I have provided an overview of scriptural, theological, and interdisciplinary approaches to boundaries, borders, and barriers. I now consider how a preacher's awareness of such dynamics opens her mind and heart to preach in a way that embraces hearers rather than othering them. As professionals in positions of power, we are called both to uphold healthy boundaries and to cross harmful barriers, such as those created by privilege, so that we affirm each of our hearers. If we fail in this call, we other them. To invite hearers into a deeper connection with God through our preaching, we must be consciously aware of how our preaching either embraces them or others them. Whenever we discover that it others, we must search for new strategies to connect.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Life Together," in *For All the Saints*, Vol. 1, ed. Frederick J. Schumacher (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994), 286.

In this chapter, I propose a set of “Theological Affirmations”<sup>2</sup> which I have crafted and which guide my preaching and ground me in my Trinitarian tradition. Next, I offer three reflections on “Power and Privilege in the Pulpit” and one on “Preaching Posture.” I then set forth practical homiletical strategies for embracing hearers, including a case study focusing on language regarding gender and sexual orientation. I conclude with suggestions on how ministries of the laity can reflect the embrace of the Word that has been proclaimed by the preacher. In this way, that embrace moves from the Holy Spirit to the preacher, to the laity, and then to the community.

### **Theological Affirmations**

#### God the Father, Maker, Creator

- God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, calling them “good.”
- God is still creating.
- God created humans in God’s image. God loves each person as they are in body, mind, and spirit and desires that each grows into their full potential and lives in joyful relationship with God.
- God, therefore, shows no partiality to any of God’s people, regardless of country of origin, ethnic background, skin or hair color or body type, language, gender, sexuality, economic status, educational level, or faith community.
- God gives humans responsibility to steward all of creation, including self, one another, and the earth.
- God gives diverse gifts to God’s people so that such stewardship may be exercised.

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow Julian of Norwich’s names for God (“Creator,” “Keeper,” and “Lover”) in the titles of my “Trinitarian Theological Affirmations.” See Matt Gunter, “Praying with Julian of Norwich and the Hazelnut,” *Into the Expectation*, 5/8/2012, <http://intotheexpectation.blogspot.com/2012/05/praying-with-julian-of-norwich-and.html>.

### God the Son, Redeemer, Lover

- God experiences the failure of God's people to live in loving relationship with God, creation, others, and self. Chief among these failures is a penchant for showing partiality to those who are most like them and avoiding, judging, or otherwise harming those who are most unlike them.
- God, whose desire for justice is unyielding, grieves the suffering of any person(s) caused by other persons.
- To reach, redeem, and reconcile God's people with Godself, God's other creatures, and themselves, God chooses to enter into human life most fully in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
- While God loves and cares for all people, showing no partiality, God shows preference for those who are on the margins of society, who suffer ignorance, exploitation, and injustice.
- God does not tolerate partiality and expects God's people to do the work necessary to move beyond barriers imposed by differences of skin color, nation, language, gender, sexuality, and economy.
- God's desire to live in loving relationship with humanity opens God's heart to offer forgiveness and countless opportunities for amendment of life.
- While Jesus' life, suffering, and death does not earn God's love or forgiveness (since God is, by nature, loving and forgiving), it provides a way whereby humanity may be restored into right relationship with God.
- God's raising of Jesus opens the way to eternal life with God now and forever. God continues to grant resurrection to God's people in the midst of life and beyond death.

### God the Holy Spirit, Guide, Keeper

- God comes to God's people of all times and places in the person of God's Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit calls the church into being as it brings God's presence to God's people.
- The Holy Spirit brings God's presence most reliably in Word and Sacrament, in the gathering of God's people to hear God's Word and share God's Supper.
- Through the Holy Spirit, God forgives sins and works for justice in the world.

- God invites God's people into this work of forgiveness and justice.
- God continues this work until the final resurrection, when all are made well and whole.

### **Power and Privilege in the Pulpit**

#### The Power of the Preacher in the Midst of Perceived Powerlessness

We clergy often feel powerless. We often experience a lack of power—to heal the nine-year-old who has leukemia, to solve the problem of poverty in our community, to save a marriage, to pull a teen back from the brink of self-harm, to meet the church budget, to slow climate change, to keep our children safe, and so on. We also encounter parishioners—and sometimes other pastors—who have expectations of us that are far beyond reasonable. We cannot possibly visit every parishioner every month, or schedule one more Bible Study or master Power Point so the confirmation lessons are more engaging, or come up with a stellar sermon every week (or maybe even once a year). With all the demands placed on us, we cannot possibly do it all, please everybody—or (some weeks, it appears) even one person. It is not surprising that we so often feel powerless.

And yet, at the same time, we are all too often ignorant of the power we do have. We forget that we, as clergy (at least historically), have a position of privilege, an authoritative (not authoritarian!) role, that we reside at the center of our community. No longer are we the most educated person in the congregation, but we have a significant amount of time (three to four years) and money invested in a seminary education. We have specialized training to preach, teach, and provide pastoral care. While we practice our ministry in an era in which there is less and less respect for our profession, there are

still people in our pews who listen to us, take us seriously, and try to live by the words we preach. We need to be aware of the power that we do have.

Being aware of our feelings of powerlessness and cognizant of the very real power we do have is imperative for us as clergy. We must recognize both what we can and what we cannot do. We must identify, create, and maintain appropriate boundaries around ourselves and our families, modeling appropriate boundary-keeping in our use of time and space, resources, roles, and relationships. It is also incumbent upon us, because the pastor is always the person in power in a relationship with a congregant, to be aware of boundary issues and alert to potential violations, to set appropriate boundaries, to interpret them to parishioners, to maintain them, to adjust them when they no longer serve their purpose, to reset them when they are violated by a parishioner, and to get professional help when we are the ones who have violated boundaries.

#### The Power of the Preacher to Other or Embrace

To what extent does our preaching contribute to othering? How can we do our part as bearers of the Word to avoid language, illustrations, observations, or pronouncements that cause a hearer to feel un-welcomed or devalued or judged? How can our preaching honor the faith of our hearers, the relationship they already have with God? How can we avoid creating an impression that we, by our “superior knowledge or spirituality,” are bringing God to hearers? How can we point to where God already is acting, to help hearers to uncover for themselves what God is already doing in their lives? How can our preaching help them discern spiritually the boundaries God may be calling them to hold—and the barriers God may be calling them to cross? To echo a prompt from

the monastic tradition of *Lectio Divina*,<sup>3</sup> how can we preachers help our hearers discern what God is inviting them to do or be, and how God is inviting them to change?

Perhaps God is inviting a woman who is listening to the sermon to set a boundary against a boss who is harassing her—and a person who is transgender to leave an abusive relationship—and a worker to confront their landlord’s illegal practices. Perhaps God is nudging congregational leaders to explore a partnership with the local food pantry or to open the doors of its recently renovated building to a family shelter displaced by a tornado. Perhaps God’s invitation is for everyone to embody the welcoming posture in a variety of ways. For example, digging into Scripture together, a community may feel impelled to create a statement of welcome for LGBTQIA2 folks in their community. They may also feel called to re-form a post-worship gathering so that barriers set by age, gender, income, or even years invested in the congregation are obliterated. For example, to shake the congregations out of its usual habits of gathering, the Hospitality Team Leader could announce, “Sit only with someone whose middle name you don’t know,” or “Keep your conversation circles open so at least two more people can join; make the circle wider, rather than locking newcomers out by closing the circle,” or “When you get your coffee or tea or juice,<sup>4</sup> pick up a card from the basket next to the sugar bowl and share the question written there about the day’s texts with your table-mates.”

I advocate that preaching for the 21<sup>st</sup> century must address the dynamics of othering, avoiding language or illustrations that other particular groups, offering

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<sup>3</sup> “What Is Lectio Divina?” *Worship: Information Sheet: Lectio Divina*, accessed 3/31-2020, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/253799/1-What-is-Lectio-Divina.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> While we are endeavoring to include all, let’s not leave out those who don’t drink coffee!

correctives for our penchant for focusing on difference, and inviting hearers to open their hearts to learn about other children of God, to hear their stories, and eventually to embrace them as fellow believers gathered around the cross of Jesus. Only then can we gather at the table to be the Body of Christ—or go out into the world together to witness the encompassing love of God for all of God’s creation, inviting our neighbors into the community of God’s people, where all are welcome.

### The Power and Privilege of Preaching in Our Multi-Religious World

There is one caveat. Although 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian preaching is unabashedly centered in God’s love expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it must also attend to the current religious context of our nation. Our hearers work with or live next to or marry those who profess Judaism or Islam or Buddhism or any number of religions, with the fastest-growing sector of religious identity being the “nones,” who profess no religious affiliation.<sup>5</sup> We must assist our hearers to live among those who believe differently than they do (or not at all), as well as those who look or act or speak differently than they do. Preaching in this century, in this contemporary context, must be alert to avoid othering people of no religious tradition and of traditions other than Christian, as well as to avoid othering anyone for any reason. I now reflect on the posture of the preacher and then offer homiletical strategies to embrace hearers toward transformation.

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<sup>5</sup> Lipka, “A Closer Look.”

## Posture for Preaching

Preaching “posture” speaks volumes before the preacher speaks a word from the pulpit; it can invite a visitor into community or reject a youth wondering about their place in the congregation or in the world. John Wycliffe, a pre-Reformation dissident Roman Catholic priest, writes about the pastor’s posture:

God ordains for a good reason that by the teaching of the pastor and his own manner of life his preaching to his sheep may be made efficacious, since this acts more effectively than mere preaching.... The life of a good pastor is of necessity a mirror to be imitated by his flock.<sup>6</sup>

This life in Christ, this “life of a good pastor,” is not a perfectly-lived life, but a life in which foibles are acknowledged, sins are confessed and forgiven, mistakes are recognized, and life is amended.

The posture of the preacher, the way she lives in the midst of the congregation, the way she recognizes, holds, and uses her power and privilege, the way she leads liturgy, teaches, delivers pastoral care and administration, can never be severed from the content or the delivery of her preaching. She, with her hearers, must stand under the Word of God. She, like them, is called to hear the Word and share in the Supper, to claim her identity as laity—as a child of God, to recognize failure and repent of sin, to grow in faith, and to carry God’s love into the world.

The integrity of a pastor’s faith and life affects the reception of the sermon in her hearers; her words must match her actions, or hearers may cease to listen. Her preaching posture, which is unashamedly authoritative, must also convey humility, gentleness, compassion, and openness to growth. This posture is seen as the pastor lives in

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<sup>6</sup> John Wycliffe, “Writings,” in *For All the Saints*, Vol. 1, ed. Frederick J. Schumacher (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994), 922.

relationship with God, the congregation, and the world, acknowledging failure and seeking to do better, whether she is in the pulpit or the study or the meeting room or out in the community. The pastor's posture toward others, within and outside the congregation, matters for the proclamation of the Word of God.

So how does a preacher find her posture? How does she “stand” within the community? Here I offer my descriptions of the posture of an embracing preacher.

- The preacher's primary identity is as one of the laity, a child of God.
- She knows herself to be at once both sinful and forgiven. She confesses her failures and receives forgiveness so that she can start over again.
- She is both disciple and apostle. As a disciple, she follows Jesus. She listens to him and seeks to do his will. As an apostle, she is sent by Jesus into the world to proclaim the gospel in word and deed.
- She is hungry to hear the gospel in order to be renewed in her identity as a child of God.
- She preaches the gospel so that she—and others—can hear the gospel.
- She is aware of her need to be intentional about moving toward openness toward others different from her.
- She is open to correction from the others in her midst.
- She is aware that she doesn't have the same experience as the other.
- She is willing to listen to and learn from and with others in the Body of Christ.
- She seeks and receives feedback from others.

When a preacher becomes aware of these postures and practices and actively works to build and improve upon them in herself, she is better able to model an authentic spiritual life for her congregation to emulate. In this way, the preacher grows as a disciple of God and, at the same time, assists her congregation to grow spiritually as well.

### **Strategies for Preaching to Embrace**

We now return to our original questions. How can we preach so hearers can hear? How can our preaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century speak to those who are invisible or hidden, wounded or broken? How can we preach in ways that include rather than exclude, embrace rather than other our hearers? How can we be “culturally competent” in our reading of Scripture and our contexts, in our preparation for preaching and in the oral, audible event of preaching? How can we, as preachers, preach resistance against the boundaries, barriers, and binaries that tear God’s people asunder? How can preachers speak and model our own healthy and appropriate boundaries? How can we speak so that each of our hearers can hear the gospel, the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ, instead of a word of rejection or dismissal or “invisibilizing”?

How can preaching help us to let go of our prejudices, address the racism and sexism and homophobia, aporophobia (the fear of those who are poor), and other phobias rampant in our midst and reach out to the “strangers” who do not fit into the worn-out categories we have drawn or inherited or affirmed in our faith communities, so that we might become, with them, friends, siblings in Christ, fellow members of God’s family?

How, indeed, can we preach so that hearers can hear? How can we preach so that they can “see” themselves in sermons and thereby grasp a Word of God as a word for them? How can we preach in ways that open our hearers to Spirit who is aching to obliterate the barriers which bind them—and us? How can we preach toward transformation in our hearers—and thereby in our congregations—so that we are impelled, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests, “to active love, to obedience, and to good works?” What are the strategies we can employ to preach so as not to other our hearers

but rather to embrace them, to preach inclusively rather than exclusively? Certainly, I recognize that I am not be able to answer all of these questions, but they are questions that come to mind as I reflect on the boundaries, borders, and barriers in our common life and renew my commitment to embracing hearers in my preaching. I now offer a few suggestions for the preaching process.

At every stage along the path of sermon preparation, there are occasions to consider how best to embrace hearers. We now look at these opportunities, one at a time, to identify practical ways to open ourselves and our hearers to the Word of God which embraces us and transforms us, compelling us to embrace others. These homiletical opportunities include four major tasks: 1) Hearing the Word of God, 2) Crafting the Proclamation, 3) Preaching as Oral/Aural Event, and 4) Feedback for the Preaching Cycle. I now explore these strategies for preaching to embrace, breaking down each strategy into a few necessary tasks. Then I will zoom in on “Attending to Language,” the first step in “Crafting the Proclamation,” focusing specifically on language around gender and sexual orientation—language that is changing rapidly!

### Hearing the Word of God

#### 1. Read the Scripture

The preacher begins sermon preparation, of course, by praying for the inspiration of God’s Spirit and by reading Scripture. Unlike other public speakers, he begins not with a problem or an idea, but with a text. The preacher, rather than merely saying something that he believes, acts as a vessel or as a conduit for words spoken by Someone in whom he believes. Preaching thus begins with God and the Word of God—the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

The preacher enters into the process of preaching by reading the text silently, but neither the Hebrew nor the Christian Scriptures were first read in silence. The Hebrew Scriptures originated in oral tradition, in which stories were told from generation to generation, until they were recorded in writing during the Babylonian exile. The Christian Scriptures, too, began as oral traditions, which were later recorded in written form and read aloud in the hearing of the congregations, as they still are today. So the preacher needs not only to read the text, but also to hear it read aloud, and, whenever possible, by another's voice, as an integral part of preaching preparation.

Perhaps the preacher attends a clergy pericope study where the participants take turns reading the texts aloud so they can hear the texts aurally, as will their hearers. Perhaps he asks lay members at a congregational Bible Study to read the text aloud so he can listen. Perhaps he listens to a recorded version of the text, or reads a variety of translations, or studies the text in its original Greek, Hebrew, or in another language in which he has facility. Perhaps he does a word study—or several—in which he explores the various contexts in which a significant word in the text is used so he can more fully understand its meaning.

## 2. Exegete the Text

In exegesis, we preachers seek to pull the meaning out of the text. Borrowing the metaphor of Jacob struggling with the angel (Genesis 32: 22-31), we might say, “We seek to ‘wrestle a blessing’ from the text.” This wrestling with a text includes asking lots of questions, such as: Which gospel are we reading? What was the author's purpose and focus? Who was the audience? What was their cultural context? What challenges were they facing? What was the author trying to convey to the readers (or the original

hearers)? How does this pericope fit into this gospel as a whole? Are there parallel verses or passages in other gospels? What words are significant in this pericope? How are they used in the rest of this gospel? In the rest of the New Testament? In the Bible? What are the layers of meaning for the original hearers of Jesus, the author, and the communities whom the author addressed?

In exegesis, we preachers tend to rely on hermeneutics, traditional frameworks, or systems for interpretation of Scriptures, often from the traditions in which we were raised or educated. In my own tradition, the Lutheran Hermeneutic is a right division of Law and Gospel. Another way to express this hermeneutic is that every sermon must, in some way, proclaim both our failure to live according to God's will and, at the same time, the good news that God accepts us anyway and again and again invites us into newness of life. To the questions addressed to an individual text, a Lutheran preacher might add the following. "Is this text honest both about our failure to live in right relationship with God and about God's action in coming to us in Jesus? What are the images of Law and Gospel in this text? What sort of metaphors for sin and grace, for trespasses and forgiveness, does this text offer? How does this text both strike us down and bring us to new life?" In this way, the Lutheran hermeneutic functions to direct our interpretation into an awareness of what separates us from God and of the ways that God, through grace, transcends those barriers to bring us into greater faith, love, and relationship with God.

### 3. Seek Diverse Voices

Traditional theological scholarship featured the voices of white, heterosexual European men. In the last 30-50 years, other voices, including those of women, have begun speaking in the academy. Today's theological voices include people who are

Black, African, LatinX, Asian, Indigenous, Mujerista, Womanist, Feminist, Liberationist and/or LGBTQIA2. No longer are theological students limited to scholars of their own culture—or denomination—or religion. Each interpreter of Hebrew and Christian Scripture is therefore responsible to recognize their own present social location—race, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, social class, education, and religious denomination—and then actively and intentionally seek to listen to voices from different social locations.

New Testament scholar Mark Alan Powell writes about the need for preachers to see and hear the Scripture from perspectives other than our own.<sup>7</sup> We need to hear the perspectives of lay people, and we need to hear the perspectives of those from cultures other than our own. He tells the story of exploring the “Parable of the Prodigal Son” (Luke 15) with seminary students in North America, Russia, and Tanzania. Powell invited the students to retell the story in their own words and then asked them what got the younger son into trouble. The American students almost all skipped one detail in their retelling; they forgot to mention the famine, and they identified the son’s “squandering” as the cause of his suffering. The Russian students noted the detail of the famine and identified that as the cause of the son’s suffering. The Tanzanian students also noticed the famine, but the reason they found for his suffering was “because no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16). Powell demonstrates how our social location affects our interpretation of Scripture and thereby offers a good argument for reading different

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Alan Powell, *What Do They Hear: Bridging the Gap Between Pulpit and Pew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 14-27.

scholars, because, when we listen to them, we begin to hear even a familiar passage from a different angle, from a different cultural perspective, and the results are enlightening!

While it is important to listen to many voices, to hear the perspectives of long-established traditions of biblical interpretation and those of scholars who have only recently been allowed at the hermeneutical table, there's another voice to which you must also attend—your own! You, as a reader of Scripture, have a perspective that matters. Just don't get stuck in the rut of thinking that your perspective—or your tradition's perspective—is the only one that matters.

#### 4. Exegete the Congregation

Homiletician Nora Tubbs Tisdale argues that preachers need to become familiar with the contexts of our hearers. We must work on exegeting the congregation as diligently as we exegete the preaching text. We need to study our parishioners, to understand their conceptual worlds so that we can search for illustrations that will resonate with them. In doing this, we can “remove false stumbling blocks to the hearing of the gospel,”<sup>8</sup> we can anticipate what we might say that would distract, causing them to stop listening. Instead, we can choose to take another tack. Then, by the work of the Holy Spirit, our preaching may open their ears to hear the gospel in new ways.

Professor of Preaching Shauna Hannan studies the interactions of clergy and laity as they gather around the Word of God. She has developed exercises for helping hearers to listen to the text and for preachers to learn from the laity, a process she labels

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<sup>8</sup> Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997), 34.

“feedforward”<sup>9</sup> (as in “feedback,” but given before the event). In “I Wonder, I Notice,” she gathers a group of laity prior to the sermon and reads the preaching text out loud slowly, inviting hearers to interrupt whenever they find themselves noticing or wondering. For example, one might exclaim, “I notice that there are four women in Jesus’ genealogy,” or “I wonder how Jesus felt when he heard that,” or “I wonder what Peter did after he denied Jesus.” This exercise affirms the musings of the laity and offers the preparing preacher a view of what the hearers see and hear in the text at first read. As the preacher reads the texts, he does well to discover or create contexts in which he can continue to hear the responses of laity, their questions, observations, noticing, and wonderings.

### Crafting the Proclamation

#### 1. Attend to Language

“Language creates reality.”<sup>10</sup> In the first creation account of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Genesis 1), God creates *by speaking* (“God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And it was so.”). In Genesis 2, God creates Adam, and then animals, and *Adam names* his fellow creatures. Speaking and naming are tasks of both God and God’s human creatures.

In Christian tradition, Jesus is himself the Word. (“The Word (*logos*) became flesh” in Jesus—John 1). The *logos* is the earthly Jesus, whose word is “trustworthy and

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<sup>9</sup> Shauna Hannan, Doctor of Ministry (DMin) class notes, Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN, June 3-7, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Desmond Tutu (“Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe reality. Language creates the reality it describes.”), accessed 3/24/2020, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/141429-language-is-very-powerful-language-does-not-just-describe-reality>.

true”—Revelation 21:5. Jesus is God’s Word for God’s people. Language for preaching matters, since God’s Word is spoken in human words. The preacher, speaking words, therefore participates in creating reality. In creating that reality, the preacher, by her language, by the words she chooses, has power to affirm or to harm, with long-standing and either life-giving or devastating consequences. The preacher must therefore attend to language before, during, and after preaching.

## 2. Choose Central Images, Phrases, and Illustrations

As we shape sermons, we preachers need to see, hear, speak with, and listen to diverse hearers, both present and absent. We need to think of our parishioners in their particular lives as we choose central images or repeated phrases or illustrations to bear the theme of a biblical story or other biblical reading. Here are some random questions to ask when making these choices:

What’s going on in the news that is demanding people’s attention and affecting their emotions? Is there a word or phrase or image in the biblical texts that might address what they are experiencing? How do these Scriptures sound to Isabella, who just lost her husband this week? To Carl, who is trying to come out to his parents? To Dave, whose divorce is finalized? To Alice, who is allegedly having an affair? To Eleazar, who literally cannot spare money to give an offering unless he fasts? Is there something in this Scripture (or in the planned liturgy—a prayer, a hymn?) that helps a high school freshman or a recent retiree or a couple who just lost their apartment know that they belong? Particularly if you yourself and/or your congregation is largely white, be intentional about searching for illustrations which feature people of color—or someone who can’t read—or a person who lives with addiction.

Here's an example of several vignettes about people in diverse situations that could be used to preach on "Who Shall Separate Us from the Love of Christ?" (Romans 8:31-37).

It was hard for Jane to raise her kids as a single mother after her husband left. She worked two jobs, leaving her kids with her mother. Some weeks she had to decide between buying toilet paper and light bulbs. She held on to hope, though, remembering that God was with her.

It was hard for Arnold to keep going after his wife died. They had been married for 55 years, and he didn't know where anything was in the kitchen or how to go shopping. He held on to hope, though, remembering that God was with him.

It was hard for Gerald to keep going when he lost his leg. In rehab, he had a lot of phantom pain, and he didn't think he would ever adjust to his prosthesis. His partner Joe came to visit him, and he couldn't hide his tears of pain and frustration. He held on to hope, though, remembering that God was with him.

It was hard for Anita to keep going after she was raped. She went to the Rape Crisis Center, and she attended a support group, and she went to counseling. But the memories haunted her. How could she even go on? She held on to hope though, remembering that God was with her.

These four examples witness to a common experience of remembering that God is with us in difficulty (i.e., that we are never "separated from the love of Christ"), but the protagonists are in quite different circumstances. The first is a young single mother struggling financially after her husband's disappearance, the second an elderly widower figuring out how to live after his wife's death, the third is a man who is gay with medical challenges, the fourth a woman suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after a rape. Each of these is holding on to the promises in Romans 8 in very different circumstances. These circumstances provide several "hooks" that might catch the attention of one hearer or another and so proclaim the gospel in ways that they can hear it

as good news for them. But there are also “sorts and conditions”<sup>11</sup> of people who are not represented in these examples. The preacher could tweak the characters to include a person with mental illness or a teen who is gender-queer or a child on the autism spectrum or a college student afraid of flunking out.

Be careful, however, that your examples of people on the margins are not limited to people who suffer or who deserve our pity because of their marginal status or their physical limitations. For example, if you tell a story about a single parent African-American mother who struggles to raise her children one week, the next week tell about an entrepreneur who is black who opened a coffee shop in your neighborhood and is giving back to the community. If you introduce a couple who is gay in your sermon, make sure that you don’t simply cast them as rejected or as people whose only identity is their sexual orientation; tell a story about how their faith helped them to overcome heterosexism or homophobia, recover from a serious illness, or become a foster-father to two sisters. If you tell a story about a father who lives in a wheelchair, use the story to help hearers understand how many barriers he faces in the course of a day to deepen compassion for those who have mobility issues, but don’t stop there. Tell not only about the burdens he faces but also about the gifts he shares in his community.

### 3. Scan for Learning Styles

There are many theories about how individuals learn differently. Various theorists offer schema of three or four or seven or eight native or dominant learning styles. While we have neither time nor space to examine these, the general concept of learning styles is

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<sup>11</sup> “For All Sorts and Conditions of Men,” *Book of Common Prayer*, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.bcponline.org/Misc/Prayers.html>.

helpful for preaching, since, in any preaching audience, there are likely to be hearers who learn in dramatically different ways.

The term learning styles is widely used to describe how learners gather, sift through, interpret, organize, come to conclusions about, and “store” information for further use... the fundamental idea behind learning styles is... that each of us has a specific learning style (sometimes called a “preference”), and we learn best when information is presented to us in this style.<sup>12</sup>

While some educational experts conclude that “there is no evidence to support the idea that matching activities to one’s learning style improves learning,”<sup>13</sup> it behooves preachers to consider a variety of ways to present their message, to keep the proclamation fresh and the hearers ready to listen. Here are some suggestions.

Employ a variety of strategies, using a visual aid one week, inviting hearers to sing along with a refrain the next, quoting a poem, telling a joke, writing a short skit based on the biblical text, and other creative ways to engage listeners. Vary the style of the sermon, the sort of introduction, and the imagery. Use diverse illustrations of biblical figures, drawing on art from cultures around the world. Be sure that images of Jesus reflect his ethnicity of origin, or use the traditional European pictures of a “white Jesus” to startle hearers into seeing Jesus as a dark-skinned Palestinian Jew. Also, search for illustrations outside your comfort zone. Explore disciplines with which you are unfamiliar; spend some time learning about a scientific concept or a historical figure or a business model. With one sort of illustration, you’ll “catch” one hearer; with another,

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy Chick, “Learning Styles,” Vanderbilt University, accessed 1/21/2020, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/learning-styles-preferences/>.

<sup>13</sup> Chick, “Learning Styles,” accessed 1/21/2020, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/learning-styles-preferences/>.

you'll catch another. Maybe only one hearer will resonate with a particular story, but maybe another will be caught by an image or quotation. As you are choosing examples, ask, "Is there a story or a phrase that might catch someone who is a visual learner, a kinesthetic learner, a verbal learner? How can I vary my preaching style to catch hearers with different learning styles?"

#### 4. Write, and Write Some More

Writer Anne Lamott advises writers, and thus preachers, to write and write and write, and specifically to write "shitty first drafts,"<sup>14</sup> not worrying about grammar or syntax but just getting thoughts down on paper or in digital form. For those who create sermons not by writing or typing but by thinking, I imagine that the process is similar. You keep thinking, going through the sermon, revising, and throwing out whatever does not "work."

Whether you write or think in preparation for preaching, remember that preaching is, at its core, an oral/aural event. Pause periodically to test your language, whether you are thinking or writing. Say a sentence out loud. Read a paragraph to see if it "works" when you hear it. If not, throw it out, or revise it. Even though you may be writing, ask how you can create a more authentically oral sermon.

#### 5. Revise Boldly with the Hearers in Mind

Once you begin writing, you're also revising. Preachers must nurture a self-critical ear so we can let go of whatever does not support the text and the theme. Is the sermon aural? Am I writing words that will be heard? Keep asking the questions you

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<sup>14</sup> Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 21-27.

addressed to the Scripture. Are you answering them? Keep going back to the text to make sure that you are not making up details or don't get mixed up with a parallel story in another gospel. As you prepare, have a wastebasket—or a delete button—at hand. Sit your probable hearers in front of you as you write. Ask how this sentence or that paragraph might sound to them in their social location and in their current circumstances. Let go of beautifully constructed sentences or great stories that won't resonate with those hearers or that don't support the central point of the sermon or that draws a barrier and keeps a marginal group out.

### Preaching as Oral/Aural Event

#### 1. Practice the Sermon

Once the sermon is written—and revised—and revised—and revised again, practice it. Practice in the space where you will preach. If you are preparing to preach in a venue unfamiliar to you, check out the acoustics or the microphone and ask someone to stand in the back to see if they can hear you. (If no one can hear you, the hearers will have nothing to hear.) Try out your voice, for volume, inflection, pace and intensity. Experiment with gestures. Practice eye contact. Look where Joy, who just got out of juvenile detention, usually sits and imagine how she might respond to what you are saying. Repeat this exercise for Dustin, who just got a new job, and Angelo and Maritza, who just declared bankruptcy, and Tianda and her partner Bea, who are taking a trip to Africa. If you say something to one of these hearers that doesn't sound right out loud, make a note to review that section. When you are finished, rework any sections or sentences or phrases that did not work when you heard them out loud.

## 2. Deliver the Sermon

Engage in the preaching task with body, mind, and spirit. Whether you preach without notes or use notecards or a manuscript or an outline, whether you are accessing text on a piece of paper or an iPad or a phone, find ways to connect with your hearers. Look at your hearers and smile, when appropriate. Establish eye contact. Use gestures. If something is getting in the way of your connection to hearers, make a mental note to investigate how you might eliminate that barrier the next time.

### Feedback for The Preaching Cycle

#### 1. Watch for Responses and Seek Feedback While Preaching

Watch your hearers. If you notice that someone looks confused, switch back and say what you just said another way. If you see smiles or hear laughter, smile back. If you notice that something didn't work at all and you have another round to preach, figure out a better way to say whatever it was you wanted to say. Try to keep track of responses; if you are able, ask a hearer who looked particularly engaged or thoughtful or confused to give you feedback.

#### 2. Exercise Constructive Self-Criticism

Let us take these three words one at a time. Exercise: Practice evaluating yourself. Assess your product, the sermon, week after week. Develop the capacity to evaluate your work, and learn from your evaluation. Consider what you can do better the next time, but do not try to improve everything all at once. Choose one improvement to work on, form a strategy, and try it in the next week's sermon. Maybe you need to keep practicing that skill for several weeks.

Constructive: Practice constructive self-criticism, not destructive self-criticism.

The preaching task is not easy; we keep working at it all our preaching lives. But we cannot grow and stretch unless we are willing to receive criticism from others and from ourselves. Be gentle with yourself. First affirm what worked in your sermon, and only then start looking for things to improve on.

Self-Criticism: Criticize yourself, gently. Evaluate only what you have control over, yourself: your words, your pace, your voice, your volume, your inflection, your pauses, your gestures, your facial expressions, your eye contact. (Don't blame the weather or the microphone or the crying baby or the deer wandering past the window.) Listen to an audio recording or watch a video recording of your sermon and make two lists: "Well Done" and "Do Better." Develop the discipline of constructive self-criticism, form a strategy, practice, and repeat.

### 3. Listen to Hearers: Feedforward and Feedback

The preacher has access to both formal and informal information-gathering when it comes to sermons. You can meet with an existing Bible Study group for "feedforward," a dual opportunity: 1) for them to hear and respond to the readings for the next Sunday, and 2) for you to hear what they hear in the text and learn from their questions and musings. You can pick a Sunday a month to ask hearers to fill out a brief form about your sermon. You can schedule a different group to meet each quarter to offer you "feedback" on sermons. In such venues, you can have free-flowing discussion or invite hearers to fill out a questionnaire. You can designate a table at the fellowship gathering after worship for hearers to ask questions or share insights about the text or to give you feedback about the sermon. You can ask team members or individuals informally, "How did that story

work in the sermon?” or “Can you think of another example I could have used?” When a congregation has opportunities to feedforward and feedback, they and the preacher create a cycle of constantly improving proclamation.

#### 4. Seek Feedback from Colleagues and Professionals

Some preachers have pericope study groups who meet regularly as part of the sermon preparation process. Perhaps they would benefit from giving sermon feedback to one member every week, as well as studying together to prepare for the next sermon. Others might form an ecumenical group with local pastors or in their judicatory to meet once a month and give and receive sermon feedback. Some might benefit from a personal coach who helps them identify areas for improvement and strategies to grow in preaching. Still others might choose to attend a master class at a homiletics conference or enroll in a study program in preaching. However we get it, we preachers need consistent and/or periodic feedback to keep sharp and up to date.

#### Summary

In the preaching cycle, we read and hear Scripture, exegete the text, converse with diverse commentators, exegete the congregation, attend to language, shape the sermon, scan the sermon for ways to catch the attention of hearers by using a variety of learning styles, write, revise, practice, preach, monitor responses, practice constructive self-criticism, seek feedback from the hearers, and access professional coaching. In each of these discrete tasks, we are seeking the end goal of crafting sermons that embrace our hearers rather than other them. Throughout the cycle, we celebrate our learning, try out new techniques, and we learn from our mistakes—and then, once a week, we begin the cycle all over again.

Having explored how to preach inclusively from start to finish, we now pause to consider the particular, practical focus of this thesis: How do we preach the gospel to those who do not find themselves within socially constructed norms of gender and sexual orientation? How do preachers ensure their language is consciously inclusive?

### **Case Study: Language About Gender and Sexual Orientation**

Our thoughtless words in preaching or pastoral care can easily other women, people of color, LGBTQIA2 folk, people who live with disability, and people living in poverty. We need to attend the words we use in reference to individuals in any of these groups. For the sake of time and space, however, I am limiting this more specific discussion to language about gender and sexual orientation. After zooming in on sexuality as a case study, I return to our wider conversation about strategies for preaching to embrace.

#### The Social Construct of Gender

One of the powers of human language to create reality is by establishing, reinforcing, or de-constructing social constructs. Social constructs, such as white privilege and abled privilege, affirm some humans while harming others. We now review the traditional social construct of gender and its harmful consequences. I then propose the de-construction of the gender binary in order to create a new, broader, and encompassing understanding of gender.

Gender is not the same as sex. Sex may mean “sexual activity,”<sup>15</sup> but for our purposes here, it means “either of the two main categories (male and female) into which

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<sup>15</sup> “Sex,” Lexico, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sex>.

humans... are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions.”<sup>16</sup> AFAB and AMAB (i.e., Assigned Female at Birth and Assigned Male at Birth) are recent substitutes for the biological designations of “female” and “male;” they refer to the sex of an individual. Of course some babies cannot be assigned sex at birth, because they are born intersex, with some combination of female and male genitalia or with visible male genitalia but female chromosomes. Biological sex can be changed intentionally by Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) or Gender Confirmation Surgery (GCS) if it does not match a person’s gender identity.

Gender, as opposed to sex, is not defined by reproductive organs, although in its traditional social construct it had only two iterations (female and male, assigned according to physical characteristics, which made it nearly synonymous with “sex”). This construct, of course, invisibilized persons who were intersex.

As understood today in the academy, gender, unlike the biological designations or physical characteristics of sex, is the self-identity and expression of a person as to how the self feels and fits on a spectrum or a sphere or a web of masculinity and femininity. Sex is generally split into two categories (female or male), but gender may be identified by a variety of terms, such as non-binary, gender-queer, transgender, agender, female, or male. This self-identity of gender can change throughout the life cycle. In addition to this gender identity (how an individual sees themselves, how they identify, with what gender their feeling and experience resonate), gender may also refer to presentation: how an individual “presents” themselves, whether through hairstyle or clothing or name or gait or speech.

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<sup>16</sup> “Sex,” Lexico.

Molly Webster explores the social construct of gender as male/female in a “Radiolab” interview series, “Gonads, X & Y.”<sup>17</sup> Surprisingly, she discovered that gonads do not function in the same way across species. Gonads can be permanent, they can be present as both male and female in one organism, or they can change from testes to ovaries (or vice versa) in an organism.<sup>18</sup> Developmental biologist David Zarkower muses, “The chromosomal narrative we have of biological sex [is] a specific way of thinking about things from a certain moment in history that we are potentially starting to rethink.”<sup>19</sup>

Marine biologist Bob Warner and graduate student Marshall Phillips study the bluehead wrasse, a common coral reef fish whose schools have only one large alpha male with a blue head and a blue-green body; the others are all little yellow females. When the alpha male dies, within hours the females pick one of their own as the next male, after which “her body starts to change, [her] scales start to change color, [and her] ovaries disintegrate and ...rebuild into testes that start producing sperm. Clownfish, [on the other hand,] go from male to female.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Gonads: X&Y,” interview by Molly Webster, *Radiolab*, WNYC Studios, 6/30/2018, audio, <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/gonads-xy>. In this podcast, Molly Webster interviews MIT biology professor David Page, University of Minnesota developmental biologist David Zarkower, UC Santa Barbara evolutionist and marine biologist Bob Warner, North Carolina State University graduate student Marshall Phillips, and Duke professor of cell biology and geneticist Blanche Capel.

<sup>18</sup> “Gonad,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 2/4/2020, <https://www.britannica.com/science/gonad>.

<sup>19</sup> Zarkower in “Gonads: X &Y,” interview.

<sup>20</sup> Warner and Phillips in “Gonads: X&Y,” interview.

Webster notes, in her conclusion, “[This changing of sex in the bluehead wrasse makes] you think a different way about how rigidly we define ourselves.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, if a fish can change its actual biological sex and its physical characteristics, might we release our social constructs around gender to receive people as they are, without trying to label them? Like the binary of left- and right-handedness, could we deconstruct the binary of gender?

### The Binary of Gender

We preachers must do our part to de-construct the traditional concept of gender. Rather than swallowing the gender binary, we can invite hearers into a more nuanced understanding than that of female/male. Rather than assigning gender to others based on our assumptions or observations, we can take cues from each individual who chooses their own words to define themselves. Due to the individual choices, the definitions of these words are not necessarily consistent from one person to another. Recognizing that two different people may define themselves differently even if they are using the same words, we must listen carefully and ask respectful questions. We must choose words about gender carefully, attending to how our language is heard and asking for clarification when necessary.

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<sup>21</sup> Webster in “Gonads: X&Y,” interview.

## 1. My Own Journey with the Gender Binary and Language

As a high school student, I became aware that language can be oppressive for women, and I ceased using “he” as an encompassing pronoun for a person and instead switched to “he and she” or “s/he.” In college, I was introduced to inclusive language for God and ditched pronouns in reference to God altogether, choosing the awkward repeating of “God” and “God’s” instead of “He” or “She.” In seminary, where there was an expectation of inclusive language in liturgy and academic work, I was careful about language in reference both to persons and to the divine. When I was married in 1985, even though it was still traditional for a wife to take the title “Mrs.,” I chose to keep my birth name and took on the title “Ms.,” although I sought to be respectful of those who made other choices.

Upon taking my first call, I made a commitment to using only inclusive language about God and about persons in preaching and in liturgy, with one exception: I did not change the language when I recited published liturgy, since my purpose was not to denigrate the hymnal or insist upon political correctness, but rather to expand our common language to include everyone. As digital liturgical resources became available, however, when my congregation began creating its own bulletins, I moved toward exclusive use of inclusive language.

Since then, my ears have been opened to a deeper awareness of language around gender. Using examples of “a boy or a girl” or “he and she” (which freed my high school self from sexism) now alienates those who do not find their identity in a gender binary. Saying “My dear brothers and sisters” may other someone who identifies as other than male or female; replace that with “Dear siblings in Christ.” Choosing “Ms.” as a title (a

right for which my generation fought) is now considered an exclusionary title by those who feel restricted by a gender binary of female/male. Some are choosing to replace “Ms.” with “Mx.”—or to reject the use of titles altogether. In my first term of this Doctoral program, I learned the term “cisgender,” referring to anyone who finds themselves at a point or within a range on the gender spectrum where society expects them to be. I came to realize that I, as a person of cisgender privilege, can use my power to identify publicly as “cis” or “cisgender,” giving permission to people who identify as transgender to claim their own identity. This self-identification also signals my desire to be supportive. As preachers using language, we must be aware of the changing nature of language and ready to change our own language.

#### Beyond the Binary of Gender/Gender Identity

There are not only changes in language about gender but also in the concepts of gender itself. While there are still people who hang on tight to a female/male binary, there are some who reject the social construct of gender altogether. Those who live beyond the gender binary are finding new ways to express their self-identity. Some choose to refer to themselves as “non-binary;” understanding that their identity is not limited to or defined by the gender binary, they opt out of the binary of female/male. Others choose the term “gender-queer;” they understand gender identity to be on a spectrum and may find themselves at the center of the spectrum or on one side or the other. Among these, to be more specific, they may say “I’m female-identified gender-queer” if they identify even a tiny bit toward the female side of the gender spectrum or “male-identified gender-queer” if they identify anywhere on the male side of the gender spectrum. Still others identify as “gender-fluid,” experiencing themselves as they are on a

given day, without any concern about labeling, weaving “their own intricate individual patterns along the gender web.”<sup>22</sup>

### Transgender Identity and Expression

“Transgender,” or “trans,” is an umbrella term for anyone who finds themselves in a physical body that does not match their gender identity, whose assigned-at-birth sex does not match the self they feel themselves to be and want to be.<sup>23</sup> A transgender person’s gender identity is outside the gender binary of AFAB/AMAB (as is that of a person who is intersex), and their experience is outside the culturally accepted belief that a person’s gender, presentation, and lifestyle should match one’s assigned gender for the duration of life. As the “trans” in “transgender” (from Latin) means “across,” “beyond,” or “through,” the definition therefore contains an inherent rejection of the gender binary. “Trans” (as an adjective) is used proudly by some who identify as transgender, but others find it offensive.

Just as the concept of gender has separate facets of identity and presentation, so does transgender. A person who is transgender may identify as male or female or gender-queer or non-binary; they may choose “he,” “she,” or “they” pronouns. They may present in various ways along the gender spectrum.

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<sup>22</sup> Diane Ehrensaft, *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children*, New York: The Experiment, 2011, quoted in definition of “gender-fluid” in Merriam-Webster, accessed 3/22/2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender-fluid>.

<sup>23</sup> For more information, see the article, “Understanding Non-Binary People: How to Be Respectful and Supportive” National Center for Transgender Equality, 10/5/2018, <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>.

- He may present as a male by dressing in boy’s clothing, by choosing a masculine hairstyle or by taking hormones to alter his appearance—or he may choose an androgynous presentation.
- She may present with a buzz cut or long, curly locks with ribbons; she may choose a women’s business wardrobe or frilly dresses.
- They may or may not make physical changes to align their body with their gender identity.

Transgender identity varies from one person to the next, as to its meaning and its expression. Some people who identify as transgender choose to live publicly according to their assigned-at-birth sex and privately according to their gender identity. Some choose to take a new legal name and dress according to their gender identity. Others take hormones to align themselves more closely with their gender identity. Still others have Gender Confirmation Surgery (or Gender Affirming Surgery) so that their sexual organs match their gender identity.

### Sensitivity to Language

#### 1. Language About People who Identify as Transgender

As in all matters of gender, preachers who are cisgender must choose their language carefully when they speak to and about people who are transgender; they must be aware of and intentional about what they say and apologize when they fail. Here are some “DO’s” and “DON’Ts.”

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| DO     | use the name the person has chosen.   |
| DO NOT | ask the person what their “real” name or “original” name was.   |
| DO     | use the pronoun the person chooses. First, listen for clues as to what words the person says. If you can’t tell, ask the person respectfully. If you make a mistake, apologize, and move on; form |

a strategy to train yourself to use the chosen pronoun, or use the person's name rather than a pronoun.

- DO ask the person how they want to be identified.  
 DO NOT use “transsexual” or “trans,” unless the person gives you permission to do so.
- DO describe a person who is transgender as a boy whose body parts don't match his experienced identity as male or as a woman whose birth-body does not square with her female identity.  
 DO NOT describe a youth who is transgender boy as a girl who wants to be a boy, or a girl “imprisoned” in a boy's body, or as a person “who was born a male” or “used to be male.”
- DO use the term Gender Confirmation Surgery or Gender Affirming Surgery.  
 DO NOT use the term Gender Reassignment Surgery; this implies that there is or was something “wrong” with the person that surgery “fixes.”
- DO use transgender as an adjective. (Say, “She is transgender.”)  
 DO NOT use transgender as a noun. (Do not say, “She is a transgender.”)  
 DO NOT add “-ed” to transgender, as in “She is transgendered.”<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Pronouns, Verbs, Nouns and Adjectives

Let's consider pronouns and verbs in reference to people who are transgender or non-binary or gender-queer. Some individuals find the pronouns “she” and “he” to be exclusionary and prefer “they.” While language and practice in the general population are lagging behind, Merriam Webster's Dictionary<sup>25</sup> and the Chicago Manual of Style<sup>26</sup> have

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<sup>24</sup> We don't say that someone is “gayed” or “lesbianed,” and what does it mean to say that someone is “transgendered”? That they were formerly transgender but are no longer? See “Terms to Avoid” in “Glossary of Terms--Transgender, “GLAAD Media Reference Guide—Transgender,” accessed 3/24/2020, <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>.

<sup>25</sup> Merriam Webster's “Word of the Year” for 2019 was “they.” See article by Anna North, “The Past, Present and Future of the Singular ‘They,’” *Vox*, 12/13/2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/12/13/21011537/they-merriam-webster-pronouns-nonbinary-word-year>.

<sup>26</sup> “Chicago Style for the Singular They,” *Chicago Manual*, 4/3/17, accessed 3/24/2020, [http://cmosshoptalk.com/2017/04/03/chicago-style-for-the-singular-they/?\\_ga=2.173362723.1024718102.1585102100-783698928.1580414245](http://cmosshoptalk.com/2017/04/03/chicago-style-for-the-singular-they/?_ga=2.173362723.1024718102.1585102100-783698928.1580414245).

recently approved the use of “they” as a single pronoun in place of “he” or “she.” In some academic institutions and medical practices, there is growing sensitivity to how students or patients or clients choose to identify. A school or office form may have a line for recording preferred pronouns (most commonly “she/her/hers” or “he/him/his” or “they/their/theirs”). We in the church can follow the lead of these professors and doctors, revising our registration forms to include those who don’t find themselves within the gender binary. For example, we can give options such as “female,” “male,” “transgender,” “gender queer,” “non-binary,” or “fill-in-the blank.”

In some communities, there has also been some movement toward advocating for new epicene (gender-neutral) pronouns.

Over the years many generic pronouns have been suggested for the English language, for example ‘zhe, zher, zhim,’ and ‘ey, em, eir,’ but none have managed to catch on [in mainline settings] so far. The solution that seems to be most popular, to the horror and disgust of language purists and grammar fanatics, is the plural they. As in, ‘if the student has any questions, they can contact their lecturer.’<sup>27</sup>

Some of the words we use about gender are adjectives, like masculine, feminine, and gender-queer. Others are nouns, like man and woman. Still others, such as male and female, may be used as either adjectives or nouns, as in, “The singer had a deep male voice” (male being an adjective) or “The class was all adult males” (male being a noun). Some of the adjectives, however, should never be used as nouns. While we may respectfully say, “He is gay” or “They are transgender” (“gay” and “transgender” as

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<sup>27</sup> Sarah O’Farrell, “He? She? Zhe? – An Introduction to Gender-Neutral Language,” Terminology Coordination, last modified 3/8/2014, accessed 1/21/2020, <https://termcoord.eu/2014/03/gender-neutral-language/>. See also: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/grammar/pronouns/gendered\\_pronouns\\_and\\_singular\\_they.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/pronouns/gendered_pronouns_and_singular_they.html).

adjectives), saying, “He is a transgender” or “They are a gender-queer” (“transgender” and “gender-queer” as nouns), is not respectful, because the indefinite article “a” objectifies the person as one in a category rather than affirming them as a unique and beloved child of God.

### 3. My Journey with Learning Pronouns

I confess that I am one of those grammar fanatics. I have had to swallow my grammatical pride to type, “Gender can refer to identity: how an *individual* sees *themselves*.” In my admittedly Anglo-Saxon-centric grammar training, I learned about linguistic boundaries, rules to keep language in check, protocols for parts of speech and person and tense and syntax. By those boundaries, “an individual sees *self*,” not “*selves*.” But if I type, “how an individual sees *themselves*,” my screen auto-corrects. I have a strong commitment to support people in finding their own identity and choosing language to name their own reality, but I am still struggling with “they” pronouns because the noun and the pronoun (i.e. the singular “individual” and the plural “themselves”) do not agree. Yet, for the sake of those who are othered by “he” or “she,” I am willing to bear the awkwardness of repetition—or the violation of my boundaries around grammar (i.e., NO SINGULAR USE OF “THEY!”), so that no one, as far as I am able to avoid it, is othered by my words.

### Language about Sexual Orientation

None of the terms discussed so far have anything at all to do with sexual orientation. The gender terms have to do only with gender identity or presentation, while orientation has to do with relationship and/or sexual attraction. A person’s sexual orientation refers to the sort of person to whom they are attracted. Just as in the case of

gender identity, only the individual may define their sexual orientation. We must therefore be sensitive to the identity, presentation, and orientation of our hearers and choose to speak in inclusive rather than exclusive ways.

We must also pay attention to the language people use to refer to their beloved. Whether a couple is married or not, regardless of their sexual orientation, we should ask the couple for their preferred way of describing their relationship. Some married heterosexual couples use “husband,” “wife,” “spouse,” or “partner,” as do some married LGBTQIA2 couples. I have also heard unmarried couples use “partner,” “lover,” or “companion.” While my favorite designation for people who are unmarried and living together is “love-in,” as in “I would like you to meet Jon, my love-in,” the principle applies here, too. I don’t have the right to identify an unmarried couple as “love-ins;” only they can decide how they will be called.

Back to orientation. A man attracted to women or a woman attracted to men has a heterosexual orientation, while a man attracted to men or a woman attracted to women has a same-gender or same-sex orientation.<sup>28</sup> A person who is attracted to both men and women has a bisexual orientation. While the adjective “transgender” refers to gender identity rather than sexual orientation, the dynamics which other people who are not of heterosexual orientation also other people who are transgender. Because of this othering dynamic, even though “lesbian,” “gay,” and “bisexual” refer to sexual orientation, and “transgender” refers to gender identity, the four groups (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

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<sup>28</sup> Same-gender or same-sex are currently used in place of the more weighted label, “homosexual,” in the LGBTQIA2 community.

transgender), over the last few decades, have coalesced into a community of others that has called itself collectively “LGBT,” for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

In the past twenty years, however, the LGBT community has again expanded its self-understanding, first to LGBTQ (“Q” designating either or both “Queer” or “Questioning”), then to LGBTQIA (“I” designating “Intersex” and “A” designating “Asexual”), and, more recently, to “LGBTQIA2” (the “2” referring to “Two-Spirit,” a contemporary organizing strategy related to a centuries-old identity in Native American communities, which might now be called “gender-less” or “gender-queer”).<sup>29</sup> By the time you read this, there may be even more letters in this identity/orientation alphabet soup! Some in the community have therefore claimed the formerly pejorative “queer” as a proud umbrella term for anyone who is not cisgender in identity and/or not heterosexual in orientation.

Let me reiterate that there is potential confusion of identity and orientation in these monikers, as I mentioned earlier. “Lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” and “asexual” refer to sexual orientation, while “transgender,” “queer,” and “intersex” refer to gender identity, but because the same dynamics of othering affect each of these groups, they have come together as one community to support one another and to continue working for equal rights for each and all of their members. The “Two Spirit” community, rather than naming a separate identity, includes people of Native American heritage who

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<sup>29</sup> Harlan Pruden, “UBC TEFA Talks Two Spirit,” You Tube, presented 10/26/2016, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Tb07GDNpow>.

identify with the LGBTQIA2 community either because of their identity or their orientation or both.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly some are frustrated by this plethora of labels and letters. Some people outside the LGBTQIA2 community may not understand why queer people want to be so specifically identified by their gender or their sexuality. Some people inside the LGBTQIA2 community may reject the labels and long for the day when each person can identify him/her/them-self without labels and be accepted as they are.

A final note about identity and orientation. A person of any gender identity may be attracted to a person of any other gender identity. This attraction may remain stable or change throughout a person's lifetime. A woman may be attracted only to men as a young adult and experience attraction to women later in her life. A man who is transgender or woman or a non-binary person or a gender-queer person may be attracted to a person of any gender. A lesbian may be partnered with a woman or a gender-queer lesbian. A bisexual man may be married to a woman after having a gay male partner. Each of us has our own identity and presentation and, independently, our own orientation, and both identity and presentation can vary from early childhood through puberty, young adulthood, and later, adulthood.

### Summary

We preachers need to do the work, learn the language, and hear the stories of our LGBTQIA2 hearers. We need to deconstruct both the gender binary and heterosexual normativity. These concepts are social constructs; people made them up, people benefit

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<sup>30</sup> Harlan Pruden, "UBC TEFA Talks Two Spirit," You Tube, presented 10/26/2016, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Tb07GDNpow>.

from them, and people maintain them, whether they acknowledge their complicity or not. Because they are not facts and there is no inherent truth in them, we can change them. In the same way, we can deconstruct the privileges of maleness, whiteness, ability, and wealth. I now turn from this “case study” of language around sexuality to a broader discussion of how preachers can use language to embrace their hearers. We are to be intentional in our preaching so that they may hear the gospel as good news for them. To do that, we need to use our words—and use them well.

### **Principles for Using Language in Preaching**

In using language for preaching, the preacher’s goal is to include, rather than exclude, every hearer. Most sermon illustrations reference Christians, adult males (and, to a lesser extent, adult females), people of European descent, heterosexual people, people who are abled, and people in middle-to-upper classes, in a word, people who fit the “norm” of the traditional, mainline, American church-goer. Preaching for the 21<sup>st</sup> century includes these traditional hearers, to be sure, but it must also include atheists and seekers, women and children, people who are gay or transgender or non-binary, people who live with disability, and people who are poor. Further, it must include not only those who appear to “have it all together,” but also hearers who have recently been released from prison, who are struggling with mental illness, who have a history of abuse or addiction, or who are grieving a broken relationship. How can we preachers speak meaningfully to people in all of these circumstances of life? First of all, we can choose language that neither gives preference to anyone nor others anyone. How can we do that? I offer six principles for using embracing language in preaching.

### Use Gender-Sensitive Language

Use gender-neutral language for both God and for people. Instead of referring to God as “He,” consider repeating “God” in place of a gendered pronoun. Rather than writing, “God created the world. He loves all people,” write, “God, who created the world, loves all people,” eliminating the need for a pronoun. Instead of using “he” to refer generically to females and males, as in, “The preacher is at the center of his community” (meaning “A preacher—male or female—is at the center of his/her community”), write, “Preachers are at the center of their communities,” or “The preacher is at the center of their community.” Alternatively, use either “she” (or “he”) to represent all genders of pastors, as in, “The preacher is at the center of her community,” or “The preacher is at the center of his community,” but first, offer an explanation that you are using “she” (or “he”) in a generic form.

Use “they/them/theirs” to avoid the binaries of “he/she,” “him/her,” “his/hers” whenever gender is not specific or when the person referred to uses “they” pronouns. Seek to overcome your resistance to using “they” as a singular pronoun by practicing it in speaking and in writing.

Utilize parallel construction when introducing scholars or characters in sermon illustrations. Rather than saying, “Dr. Volf and Rita,” for example, use similar titles for both: Dr. Volf and Dr. Nakashima Brock. Don’t give the male scholar a title and call the female scholar by her first name. This principle applies as well when you introduce persons of different ethnicities or abilities. Rather than presenting Michelle Obama and Laura Bush as “Michelle” and “Mrs. Bush,” say “Obama and Bush” or “Mrs. Obama and Mrs. Bush,” so that the characters are accorded equal status. Rather than saying “Dr.

Phil” and “Temple,” look for a parallel construction, like “Phillip McGraw” and “Temple Grandin.”

### Follow the Lead of the Person

When you talk about a specific person, follow their lead. If someone identifies as gender-queer and uses “they” pronouns, be intentional in using “they” pronouns to affirm their identity. When you talk about a woman who has Native American heritage, listen to how she identifies herself, and then use the language she uses. (Does she say, “I am a First Nations member” or “I am Native American” or “I belong to the Cree Nation”? Listen and follow her lead.) When you talk about a male-identified gender-queer person or a male who is transgender who uses “he” pronouns, affirm his identity by using the pronouns he has chosen.

Be alert to the most recent changes in language regarding skin color and ethnic heritage in the U.S., and incorporate them into your preaching. Listen to the news and pay attention to newspapers, blogs, or podcasts for clues about how different individuals and groups of people of color name themselves. For example, U.S. citizens who have African heritage have been labeled in a variety of ways: Negro, colored, Black, Afro-American, African-American, bi-racial, Person of Color, to name a few. How do these folks identify themselves now? Listen to the words a woman of African heritage uses to identify herself, and affirm her identity by using those terms, whether she is famous or someone you know. Children of Asian and European heritage may prefer more specific language, such as Japanese-Swiss or Korean-American. Teens of Latino heritage may call themselves Latino (male), Latina (female), LatinX, and, most recently, Latine (both gender neutral). An American of Native heritage may identify as Indigenous American or

American Indian or Native or by his tribe or sub-tribe. Avoid using the word “race” (as in “the black race,” “the Oriental race,” or “the indigenous race,”) to refer to a subset of humanity, thus dividing people into non-existent genetic or biological categories.

Use the most recently adopted language regarding sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual expression. In these days as more marginalized groups find their voices and choose their identities and pronouns, the language considered acceptable is changing rapidly. Check in with LGBTQIA2 folks to find out what words they choose to identify themselves. Most mainline denominations have organizations which support LGBTQIA2 individuals and assist congregations to become openly affirming of them. These include “Reconciling Works” (ELCA), “More Light” (PCUSA), “Integrity” (ECUSA), and “Affirmation” (UMC). You can connect with these organizations or the local Pride Center to learn about current language (or to access information, ideas, and resources). Pay attention to words which are changing, and try to incorporate them into your speech and your preaching.

#### Avoid Colonizing Language

Avoid colonizing language and practice as much as possible. For example, rather than “Columbus Day,” celebrate “Indigenous People’s Day.” Try to find more respectful ways to speak than terms in which the person identified is referenced by another’s culture, such as “American Indian” (problematic both in its reference to Amerigo Vespucci and to the nation of India), or “Hispanic” (which encompasses speakers of a language not native to their ancestral home). I am aware that I have used “Hispanic” in this project in quoting from sources, such as the U.S. Census. The Latino, Latina, LatinX, and Latine designations are similarly problematic in their reference to colonizing nations

that spoke Spanish (which is rooted in Latin), but so far, I am not aware of better terminology. Recognizing the complicated and burdensome legacy of colonialism, we must, nonetheless, seek to speak in ways that honor pre-colonial peoples and their descendants, and remind hearers of their histories.

### Say It Out Loud

From the pulpit, we preachers have the privilege of speaking about whatever we choose. How can we use that privilege for good? We can speak about difficult topics, and we can say words that are hard to say and hard to hear. When the biblical text—or the week's news—offers an opportunity to speak about a difficult topic, grasp the opportunity! If the gospel contains Jesus' response to a question about divorce, talk about marriage and divorce and remarriage. Afraid to talk about it? Count how many people in the congregation are remarried—or how many council members are living together with partners—and think about what it would mean for them to hear their pastor exploring a topic they have probably already thought a lot about. If the second lesson addresses the unequal relationships between men and women, explore our changing understandings of gender. A teen-aged girl finding her way through the world or a middle-aged man who is tired of emulating his authoritarian father may listen carefully. If the text from the Hebrew Bible is about Moses and Miriam singing praise for God's genocide of the Egyptians, preach about theodicy—or about our penchant for othering our enemies—or how we treat those who are different from us, as Israel did in their joy at triumph over the Egyptians.

Be alert to opportunities to speak about things that are hard to speak about. Say words that are hard to say, and say them out loud. When parishioners hear a preacher say

“suicide” or “rape” or “miscarriage” or “domestic violence” or “abortion” or “female genital mutilation” out loud and in public, they know that they have permission to tell us about their own struggles, that there is no judgment if they have been abused or if they are addicted or have been diagnosed with mental illness, although some other listeners may be angry that we have talked about something so “depressing” or “non-spiritual” or “political” in church. When we say such words out loud, parishioners find courage to share their experiences of suicide or miscarriage or abortion. Let me offer one caveat: speaking these words may trigger painful emotions. The preacher should be ready to offer pastoral care and provide opportunities for these hearers to tell their stories.

#### Person First

Use person-first descriptive language rather than adjectivizing someone. Instead of identifying the person by their physical or health condition, first acknowledge the person’s humanity by putting the noun before the descriptor. Instead of quoting, “A bleeding woman” (Matthew 9:20-22/ Mark 5:25-34/ Luke 8:43-48), say, “a woman with a flow of blood.” Rather than speaking of a “blind person,” speak of “a person who cannot see.” Rather than saying “a paralytic” or “cripple,” say, “a person who was paralyzed” or “a person with mobility issues.” (This principle is not followed by the gospel writers, so don’t look to them for inspiration!) Speak intentionally in respectful ways rather than in judgmental or pitying ways, and avoid outdated terms that other people. Below is a list of inappropriate descriptors and suggestions for how to correct them.

#### INSTEAD OF SAYING...

a blind person  
a handicapped person  
a female pastor

#### SAY...

a person who has difficulty seeing  
a person who uses a wheelchair  
a pastor who is a woman

a mentally retarded boy  
 a brain-injured person  
 an ex-convict  
 an autistic daughter  
 a gay person

a boy who is developmentally disabled  
 a person who has a brain injury  
 a person who was formerly incarcerated  
 a daughter on the autism spectrum  
 a person who identifies as LGBTQIA2

Instead of using a word that denigrates a person or a grammatical construction that places the descriptor prior to the identity of the person, begin with the person and then add the descriptor.

### Summary

As we seek to preach in ways that embrace siblings in Christ who find themselves beyond any of our worn-out social constructs, we must re-examine our reliance on outdated words and grammar rules and social constructs and preaching practices. As we follow these principles for speaking to embrace in preaching, we are training ourselves to be intentional in our thinking and our speaking. As we learn to use gender-sensitive language, to speak using the words spoken by the people to whom we are speaking or referring, to avoid colonizing language, to speak about difficult issues, saying out loud words that are usually not heard in church, and to refer to the person first before labeling them with any descriptors, we grow in preaching respectfully and intentionally. By our language acquired by practice, we include those who have been longing to belong.

### **Preaching in the Context of the Congregation's Ministry**

#### Postures of Ministry: Welcoming or Othering?

In pastoral ministry, we simultaneously juggle many tasks. As we aim to practice welcome in our proclamation, we must not neglect to translate the embrace we extend in preaching to the whole of the congregation's ministry. Preaching, in other words, does

not happen in a vacuum! Just as the preacher cannot preach severed from self, the task of preaching cannot be performed detached from other tasks of pastoral and congregational ministry. The preacher must monitor consistency between the proclamation of the sermon and the proclamation conveyed by the website, the sign on the church lawn, the access to the building or lack thereof, welcoming and directional signage inside the building (a rainbow flag, a sign for gender-neutral bathrooms, an arrow pointing to the sanctuary), congregational registration forms and publications, and the liturgy.

No matter how eloquently the pastor's sermon preaches welcome (or acceptance or grace or mercy), if a visitor dressed in jeans and a t-shirt experiences rejection in the narthex or a person who is gender-queer cannot find a place for themselves in the liturgy or a person who is transgender walks into a bathroom and is told, "You don't belong in here!" the words of that welcoming sermon are meaningless. All facets of a congregation's ministry must "preach" the same message; the posture of these ministries must be consistent, or others will not find welcome. We now look at these six venues—Liturgy, Music, Hospitality, Leadership, Christian Education, and Social Ministry/Social Justice—and how they can underline or erase the welcome extended in a sermon.

## 1. Liturgy

God's Word is spoken through liturgy as well as proclamation, even though it comes, of course, through our very human—and sinful—efforts. The benefits of a welcoming sermon may be supported or destroyed by the liturgy (or the performance of said liturgy by the presider or assistants). The language employed in the liturgy may include—or it may exclude, as it did in the story told by the intern in my college student

congregation in the Introduction. Preachers must therefore prepare the liturgy as diligently as we do the sermon.

Brian Eklund, a retired ELCA pastor and internship supervisor at St. Mark's Church in central-city Los Angeles, taught pastoral interns to spend as much time and energy preparing the liturgy as the sermon. "Sometimes," he said, "the sermon will fail, but the Holy Spirit may also use the liturgy."<sup>31</sup> He created liturgies for each season, writing litanies based on the Scriptures of the day and Eucharistic Prayers following the themes of the season. Brad Schmeling, an ELCA pastor at Gloria Dei Church in St. Paul, MN, crafts Eucharistic Invitations which make it clear that all of God's people—every single one of God's people—are welcome at the Lord's table.

'This is Christ's table. It is a table of love and welcome. It is a table of fellowship with the poor; it is a table of communion with the earth. So, come those of you have great faith and those of you who wish you had more. Come those of you who have tried to follow Jesus and those of you who have failed. Come those of you who depend on this meal for your life and those of you for whom it is a strange thing. These are the gifts of God for the people of God.' This invitation to the table, often spoken as we prepare to receive communion, reveals much about who we are, what we believe, and how we celebrate Holy Communion.<sup>32</sup>

The preacher must ask, when creating liturgy, "Is the language of the liturgy inclusive?" This question, of course, must be considered carefully, because as leaders at the center of the community, we are prone to feel included. It's hard for us to imagine what it's like for someone to enter our communities not knowing if they will be welcomed or rejected.

Here are some questions which could guide decisions about whether or not a particular liturgy is accessible to worshippers:

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<sup>31</sup> Brian Eklund was my supervisor during a pastoral internship at St. Mark's (1987-1988) and taught me to attend to the preparation of the liturgy.

<sup>32</sup> Brad Schmeling, "What We Believe about Communion," Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.gloriadeistpaul.org/worship/communion/>.

- Is the bulletin or power point presentations easy to follow?
- Does the presider's invitation to stand at the beginning other those who cannot easily stand? Does it draw attention to their loss of mobility? How does it feel for a person in a wheelchair to hear this invitation?
- Can a person who can't read participate? Are there repeated responses that can be committed to memory? Are there phrases in the liturgy of a particular season that people can repeat and thus learn week after week?
- Are there items in the liturgy that "invisibilize" a worshipper? When does a person who is gender-queer join in reading when the bulletin indicates that the recitation of the psalm is rotated between women and men?
- Does the liturgy affirm that among the Christian fold there are people who speak and sing in many languages?
- How are children included in worship? Are they to be "seen and not heard"? If they make noise, do people glare at them or their parents or grandparents? Can they find images of themselves on the wall or in the bulletin? Are there children's bulletins or children's books or quiet toys available? Are there songs that they can sing? Are there repeated liturgical phrases that they can learn? Do they have a role in worship? Can they help greet worshippers or take the offering or assist with communion or sing in a choir or play rhythm instruments or lead a short portion of the liturgy?

In a broader way, liturgy may lift up and critique othering tendencies in our community. A "Confession and Forgiveness of Our Sins of Racism," for example, may allow worshippers to acknowledge the Church's complicity in systemic racism. As Wink posits, honesty before God requires acknowledgement of our personal and corporate failure to love one another. He writes, "transformation comes not through the denial and repression of our evil, but by [collectively] naming it, owning it, and lifting it up to Christ."<sup>33</sup> In this way, the liturgy of Confession and Forgiveness can be a starting point for the healing work of transformation and reconciliation.

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<sup>33</sup> Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 40.

## 2. Music

Music in worship may be welcoming or off-putting for a newcomer. In order to welcome, a song must either be familiar, easy to sing, or patiently taught over a period of weeks. To introduce a new song, the choir could first sing it as an anthem. The next time, the congregation could sing the refrain, with a cantor singing the verses. Eventually, the congregation could sing the whole song.

Diversity in worship music must be representative both of those who are there and those who are not there. A variety of styles of music from different cultures can spark awareness that there are Christians who worship using different rhythms or melodies. The visitor might notice that the worshipping community honors songs from many traditions. Teaching a refrain or other short bit of a song in a language other than English can affirm members of the congregation who speak that language—and point to those who are missing in the cultural composition of the worshipping community—and remind worshippers that the church is global, not merely local. A native speaker of the language can demonstrate the pronunciation so the congregation can practice and become more comfortable with both the words and the music. Some high school students studying the language could sing the verses, and the congregation could sing the refrain. Another time the congregation could sing the verses in English and the refrain in the native language. The point of this planned introduction is to expose the congregation to the song gradually, to reduce frustration at an experience of linguistic incompetency, and to celebrate their faith with other Christians (whether present or not) who speak a different language than they do.

Preachers and worship planners should be aware that some songs carry such heavy personal memories that a worshipper may have an emotional, or even traumatic, reaction. An elderly man hears a hymn that his grandmother sang to him in German as a child. A teen weeps at the hymn sung at a friend's funeral. A young woman, abused by her father as a child, cringes when she hears, "Have Thine Own Way, Lord." Another, also abused by her father, having survived by singing "In the Garden" silently, is shamed when the preacher criticizes the self-centered "I" language of the song. We preachers, as worship planners, need to be alert to words in hymns that may trigger post-traumatic stress or anxiety attacks and be ready to offer support.

### 3. Hospitality

The hospitality ministry of a congregation is primarily the work of choosing, practicing, and evaluating welcoming postures throughout the ministry. One of the pastor's tasks, both within and outside of preaching, is modeling welcoming behavior. Another is nurturing awareness of welcoming postures, helping members to imagine what it would be like to be a stranger in their midst. Yet another is helping members to see how they view visitors—and how they can grow as "Welcomers."

If the members of the congregation do not act in a welcoming manner, a visitor will not experience welcome. However mightily the pastor has sought to proclaim that LGBTQIA2 folk (as all folk) are welcome, the judgmental attitude of an usher toward a couple who are lesbians or a careless comment to a person who is transgender at the coffee hour or a thoughtless question asked of a person who identifies as non-binary in Bible Study can scare away a visitor who has entered the community wondering if they

will be ignored or stared at (and, perhaps, at the same time, hoping against hope that they will, indeed, be welcomed).

Congregations and pastors must periodically evaluate their Hospitality Quotient. Visitors and new members, who bring new energy and new ideas, can articulate how they experienced the congregation on their first visit and what might have made that experience better. They can tell us how it felt to walk in, and we can implement their suggestions for improvement. We can also send out an individual or a couple to visit another congregation and bring back a report about how it felt to be a stranger and what they found to be helpful and unhelpful.

Here are some questions for those interested in welcoming newcomers to think about their Hospitality Quotient. Do our congregational postures convey a message of welcome or rejection—for a family, a single person, an older person, a couple including a woman who is bisexual and a man who is heterosexual? Do we see the stranger as someone lacking a relationship with God and in need of our deeper, more mature spirituality? Is she someone whom we expect to have a similar faith background as we do—or no background? Are we “bringing God” to them or pointing to where we see God working or being alert to looking for God together with them? Is our posture one of community-building together or inviting the stranger into our already established community?

Here are some questions that can help identify specific ways the congregation can improve its welcome. Do the entry points for newcomers offer messages consistent with the preacher’s proclamation of welcome? Is the website up-to-date? Is it user-friendly? Are the graphics interesting, but not too busy? Can a visitor navigate to the information

they need? Does the parking lot provide easy access for visitors? Are there reserved spaces for visitors and for drivers or passengers needing accessible parking? Does the signage convey a sense of welcome? Are the entry doors unlocked or, if locked, does the signage point the visitor to an entry they can access? Is there only one door unlocked for an evening meeting because everyone in the congregation knows which door that is? How is the visitor to find out about this custom?

Is the brochure eye-pleasing? Is the information current? Do registration forms convey awareness that a person who identifies as gender-queer or a couple that is LGBTQIA2 might want to plan a baptism or a wedding? Does a visitor encounter “someone like him,” (of similar age or ethnicity or language or ability) on the bulletin cover, in the liturgy, in photos on the bulletin board, or in the artwork in the sanctuary or in the entryway?

How do visitors feel when they enter the “Coffee Hour” or the “Fellowship Hall”? Are they ignored—or stared at? Does calling it “Coffee Hour” leave out those who don’t drink coffee? Does calling it “Fellowship Hour” leave out people who don’t consider themselves to be “fellows”? Does the newcomer who is non-binary, looking for a place to sit, hear, “Here’s a place for you,” or “You can’t sit here. This is a table for women”? Are there impenetrable clusters of tightly connected long-term members or extended families who see each other weekly (but only in church)? Are newcomers identifiable because they are sitting alone or wandering around at the edges looking at the pictures or bulletin boards? Paying attention to our welcoming posture, asking specific questions about our welcoming procedures, and adjusting those procedures will hopefully make the next visitor’s entry a bit easier.

#### 4. Leadership

Deb Conklin, an ELCA pastor in Bowling Green, Ohio, talks about the “emerging church” as the “church that emerges as each new person enters the door.”<sup>34</sup> Do we receive the gifts and ideas and energies of those who enter our doors, or do we expect them to fit into our established patterns of doing ministry? Do the same people always do everything and criticize other volunteers for doing the task improperly—and then complain that no one else will do the work?

Can a newcomer easily figure out how to join a given ministry? Is information about the Prayer Shawl Ministry or the Softball Team or the Bible Study available? Are communication venues (announcements, bulletin, newsletter, website, and bulletin board) well utilized? Do we assume that a newcomer knows what we know, or do we pounce on a first-time visitor to read a lesson or come to a meeting or run for the council? We do well to welcome a visitor and become acquainted so we can invite them to activities that might meet their interests rather than pushing them to get involved just because we want to promote good attendance or need to fill in a leadership slot.

#### 5. Christian Education

Christian Education is the church’s best effort to pass the faith from one generation to the next and to catechize adults who have been unchurched or de-churched. It takes many forms, from Sunday morning classes divided by age to Wednesday evening all-age gatherings to summer Vacation Bible School to adult education opportunities such as weekly Bible Study or new member classes or periodic series. Christian Education

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<sup>34</sup> Deb Conklin, a colleague during my years as a pastor in Toledo, OH, seeks to nurture the church that emerges anew whenever a newcomer enters.

efforts may be welcoming or off-putting. The time of day or day of the week may not be convenient for some. The setting may be too dark or too cramped. The curriculum may be outdated or not reflect the concerns of those gathered.

Again, a congregation may want to do some evaluation; what is its Christian Education Quotient? Do the leaders and teachers represent the diversity in the congregation—and in the community? Is the program age-appropriate? Will an Asian family or a couple who is LGBTQIA2 with a baby find themselves represented in pictures in the curriculum or video or crafts? Are people with different abilities represented? Attending to some of these questions and adjusting the program may provide a more welcoming atmosphere for all who come to learn.

## 6. Social Ministry and Social Justice

Social Ministry is the task of caring for the neighbors whom God gives us by collecting non-perishable food for a local pantry, socks for a local homeless ministry or diaper cream for a baby pantry. Social Justice is the task of seeking to change the systemic conditions that create the needs which press upon our neighbors. In either of these outreach ministries, we must be careful not just to give to “those less fortunate than we are” or write a check (which is, of course, needed, to provide daily necessities right now), but also to work on developing relationships, learning from those who are different from us, and advocating for change at local, national, or global levels. Whether our task is Social Ministry or Social Justice, we must be aware of our posture of giving.

Here again, we can check our Social Ministry Quotient. Journalist Margie Farnham served as a Lutheran World Federation journalist in Rwanda in 1994 to report on the genocide there. She tells of seeing a note on her Rwandan colleague’s desk: “If

you have come here to help us, you might as well go home. If you have come here because your humanity depends on it, we can work together.” Are we treating the other as one who needs our magnanimous help or as one with whom we might learn and grow? Do we do outreach through Social Ministry or Social Justice to help the needy or salve our consciences or feel better about ourselves, or do we enter this work because our humanity depends on being neighbors and working together with our fellow human beings? Asking these questions can help us to improve our Social Ministry posture.

### Summary

Alongside preaching, Liturgy, Music, Hospitality, Christian Education, and Social Ministry all participate in the welcoming strategy of a pastor and congregation. As the preacher preaches, models welcome, and trains the congregation, each of these ministries can contribute to the congregation’s embrace of the stranger.

### Conclusion

Preachers can, indeed, preach to embrace rather than to other. Using an “All at the Table” hermeneutic, we can practice a posture of humility and receptivity to new people with new ideas. We can be attentive to our language and ready to learn from newcomers about how they wish to be introduced and addressed. We can listen to diverse voices interpreting Scripture, thus stretching our understanding beyond our cultures of origin and our limited experiences. We can open our eyes to notice the barriers that we create and/or maintain which close the doors of our churches to those who don’t fit the model of the typical mainline church-goer. We can identify and navigate boundaries that protect the vulnerable and dismantle barriers which keep others out. We can be aware of our own power and privilege, alert to the ways that we or someone else misuse them, and

cognizant of strategies to use them for the good of those who arrive in our midst after having been othered. We can preach in ways that embrace hearers and model appropriate embrace of others who enter our doors. We preachers can, through our words and our actions and the work of the Holy Spirit, enable hearers to encounter those who are different from them, connect with them, and embrace them as fellow workers with us in the reign of God. We can offer our human words to be used by the Spirit to transform our congregations into safe spaces of welcome and embrace, for all of God's children, for every beloved child of God.

## CHAPTER 6

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

#### **Results**

I began this thesis with several convictions: about God’s love for all people, about boundaries as necessary and barriers as problematic, about how dynamics of power, privilege, and purity allow those who erect barriers to cast others out, and about how the preacher, aware of their own professional boundaries and the dynamics of power, privilege, and purity, can utilize strategies to cross barriers to share the love of God with all people. I took these convictions and began reading and thinking and re-thinking. I now consider how I have confirmed and deepened these convictions, one by one.

#### God Loves All of God’s People Regardless of Social Location

I confirmed this conviction with the exploration of biblical literature using an “All at the Table” hermeneutic and the lens of othering in Chapter 2. In both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, we meet a God who loves and embraces all people. God’s relationship with God’s people, while demanding justice and righteousness, always “bends to the arc” of mercy, love and forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> Even though the acronym

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this “arc” metaphor from Unitarian minister Theodore Parker. At the 1964 Baccalaureate sermon at Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT), Martin Luther King, Jr., quoting Parker, said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/11/15/arc-of-universe/>.

“LGBTQIA2” or words like male privilege or disability never appear in Scripture, God’s posture as revealed in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is one of embrace of all people. God invites us to join God in that embrace.

#### Boundaries as Necessary, Barriers as Problematic

In Chapter 3, I deepened my conviction about boundaries being necessary (to keep us and others safe) and barriers being problematic (when used to keep vulnerable others outside the margins). Looking at the boundaries, borders, and barriers imposed by Biology and Evolution, Geography and Environment, Developmental Psychology, and Anthropology and Sociology, without suggesting that boundaries should be unilaterally dismantled, I identified the need for preachers to move beyond barriers that other people, ostracizing them from community.

#### Power, Privilege, and Purity Create Barriers and Confer Benefits

In Chapter 4, synthesizing the work of Walter Wink, a variety of voices outside the historical theological mainstream, and L. William Countryman, I highlighted the ostracizing and debilitating effect that barriers have on people who are marginalized and explored the work we have to do around boundaries, borders, and barriers. That work for preachers includes nurturing conscious awareness of healthy boundaries, discerning barriers that keep others out, dismantling barriers that are outdated, and drawing new boundaries, when needed, to protect the vulnerable.

#### Strategies for Preaching to Dismantle Barriers

In Chapter 5, I offer a two-pronged resource for preachers young and old, experienced and novice, of any gender or social location or sexual orientation, to learn: 1)

about how preaching “lands” on hearers and 2) about how to make specific changes in their preaching process which will cause that “landing” to be more accurate. My “All at the Table” hermeneutic, which lifts up an array of distinct voices, provides a lens for learning both about the barriers preachers uphold and ways to dismantle them.

The first prong of this resource invites preachers to analyze their preaching according to the lens of othering, to look at their own preached words and note how their hermeneutics and language and illustrations either embrace or other people who are traditionally not welcome in church because of their history or behavior or identity or socio-economic level or style of dress. It offers ways to consider how their preaching “lands” on their hearers, especially those most vulnerable to rejection and ostracism, and how they can become more aware of gaps in their own welcome of these siblings in Christ.

The second prong invites preachers to consider strategies for improving their capacity to embrace their hearers, especially those who are typically unwelcome, how they can expand their understanding of and language about others, how their choices of language and illustrations impact the effectiveness of their proclamation on their hearers, and how they can deepen hearers’ engagement so that they, indeed, can hear the Word of God proclaimed and receive its transforming power so that they may grow in love, obedience, and good works.

### **Strengths**

This project is timely. Our nation is so divided these days, and we must find ways to talk together, to argue respectfully, to work together, to learn from each other, to laugh

together, and to love one another. The church—and specifically the preacher—has a platform either to promote this division or exacerbate it.

The specific focus of my project is relevant to these times of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And yet, language about people who identify as LGBTQIA2 is changing rapidly, so rapidly that, by the time this thesis is printed and shelved in the library of Luther Seminary, some of the language I offer will be out of date! We preachers need to equip ourselves to speak to “all sorts and conditions”<sup>2</sup> of people in ways that do not other them, and we need to keep up with changes in how to speak about the “sorts and conditions” of our hearers.

The practice of asking LGBTQIA2 people to define themselves, name themselves, speak for themselves, and teach others about their identities and their lives is a model for how we treat all others. Just as we listen to the pronouns a person who is gender-queer chooses, just as we use the name a person who is transgender tells us, just as we introduce a couple who is gay the way they have identified themselves to us (“partner” or “spouse” or “husband,” for example), so we can take each other who enters our church doors as he or she is—or as they are. We can ask members who live with disability to form an adult education panel to share their insights and experiences; we can listen to the visitor who works at a fast-food restaurant and struggles to make ends meet to learn how their faith sustains them; and we can invite people who live in a group home for developmentally disabled adults to join us to worship and learn together.

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<sup>2</sup> “For All Sorts and Conditions of Men,” *Book of Common Prayer*, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.bcponline.org/Misc/Prayers.html>.

### Growing Edges

This topic is very broad, perhaps too broad, but in this thesis it required interdisciplinary lenses and a variety of voices. Due to limited time and space, the overview of boundaries, barriers, and borders from the physical and social sciences and, to a lesser extent, from theology, was necessarily shallow.

The biblical exploration was not exhaustive. Again, because of the breadth of the topic and the limits of time and space, I limited my exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures to Torah and Isaiah and of the Christian Scriptures to the gospels, Acts, and, very briefly, to the letters of Paul.

The voices to which I attended were not diverse enough. One of the strategies I recommend in Chapter 5 for preaching to embrace hearers is for the preacher to listen to diverse voices. Near the end of writing this thesis, I discovered that I had not followed my own strategy. In preparation for writing, I did consult a variety of scholars. Some were women, some Feminist, some Womanist, some gender-queer, and some transgender. A few were African-American, and even fewer were Asian, LatinX, and Native American. Several were LGBTQIA2. But the theologians on whom I most relied were Anglo-Saxon men (although both had some awareness of their male privilege): Walter Wink and L. William Countryman. In his *Powers* trilogy, Wink rejected the practice of patriarchal domination, and Countryman wrote about Christian sexual ethics from his perspective as an Episcopal priest and seminary professor who is gay.

The emphasis on LGBTQIA2 issues, while necessary due to time and space limitations, skewed the work away from my central interest, the dynamics of othering. While the focus was necessary, I am not saying, “The church must embrace people who

are queer.” Instead, I am saying, “Let us all confess our sins of othering and, as we are, sinful and redeemed, return to the baptismal font for restoration into relationship with God. Let us be nourished at the table and re-incorporated into the Body of Christ, so that we are formed to welcome all who are thirsty for baptism or hungry for communion, who come among us, as they are. Let us embrace these othered children of God, so that they and we, together may go out to do God’s work in the world, among God’s people—all God’s people.”

I paid little attention to scholars who would disagree with my arguments. I could, for example, engage Robert A. J. Gagnon, a professor of New Testament Theology at Houston Baptist University, whose biblical and theological approach to sexuality differs markedly from mine. I could also review arguments for and against inclusion of LGBTQIA2 people within my own denomination (the ELCA), other Lutheran denominations, and ecumenical and interfaith partners.

### **Surprises**

I learned so many new words. Some of these were literally newly created words, not even in many dictionaries. Some were words I had never heard before. Some were old words with changing meanings. I am grateful for an expanding vocabulary, especially as it gives me more words to affirm God’s beloved children.

The sudden spread of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) around the world was a surprise—a big surprise!—toward the end of writing this thesis. The pandemic, its global effects, the attempts to contain it, and the public’s reactions offer much fodder for reflection on the concept of boundaries, barriers, and borders, as well as how it further others those on the margins. I address this topic more fully in the next chapter.

### Self-Learnings for Future Research

In future work,

- I would resign from pastoral duties and focus instead on researching, writing, and revising full time so that I could expand the scope of the thesis.
- I would follow the principle of listening to diverse voices more intentionally, by prioritizing authors of color, LGBTQIA2 folk, women, and those living with disability on my theological reading list. I would lament the paucity of voices of those who are poor; by the application process and financial barriers to admission to theological institutions, they are silenced by the academy.
- I would broaden the explanation and application of my “All at the Table” hermeneutic.
- I would expand my study to include the historical, prophetic, and wisdom books of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline letters, and the Book of Revelation to discover how they address the dynamics of othering.
- I would do more in-depth research in a variety of academic disciplines, exploring concepts of boundaries, barriers, and borders, and its dynamics as both life-giving and life-damaging.
- I would expand the sections on privilege with more diverse voices.
- I would expand the discussion of language in the “Strategies” section to include parallel discussions about appropriate language regarding people who are not white, people who live with disabilities, and people who live in poverty. This more balanced attention to several groups who experience othering would satisfy my desire to focus on the dynamics of othering rather than on how to include a particular group of others.
- I would pay more attention to searching for and responding to arguments against my thesis.

Due to the vastness of this topic and the page limits of this thesis, I narrowed my research and presentation to strategies for preaching geared specifically to embrace the LGBTQIA2 community. I believe this work provides a necessary foundation for more in-depth research and reflection, as the biblical hermeneutics, the interdisciplinary approach,

and the preaching strategies employed here can be consciously applied to groups of others beyond the queer community.

CHAPTER 7  
REFLECTION

**Value of the Project for Ministry**

My Ministry as a Pastor

When I started this project, I was academically starved. Juggling a full family life and a busy pastoral profession in a struggling church in a central-city parish in a neighborhood where the majority of residents experienced unmet needs did not allow much time for scholarly reading, research, or writing. I am grateful that I have had the privileges of time, focus, and finances to pursue this degree and to explore a topic that has been nudging itself into the center of my consciousness for the past three decades.

My Congregation's Ministry

This project has already had an effect on the congregation in which I serve. At least 35 parishioners have shared their feedback and/or feedforward over the three years of my preaching while studying preaching. Some participated in formal "Parish Response Groups" and some filled out feedback forms, while others gave informal comments. Nearly all expressed their gratitude to be asked to participate.

The thesis topic has also affected my preaching. As I have sought to understand boundaries, barriers, and borders more deeply, grappled with my ever-growing list of

questions about preaching to embrace, read scholars outside the mainstream, completed research, and written papers to fulfill coursework requirements, my preaching has become bolder and more focused on justice issues. At the same time, as I have focused strategically on engaging hearers, I have avoided judgment or stridency, allowing hearers to hear even sermons which challenged their white, middle-class, privileged comfort.

### Ministry in My Judicatory and Community

As I complete this project, I anticipate sharing my learning with colleagues in my judicatory, the Metropolitan New York Synod (MNYS) of the ELCA. I have discussed with Bishop Paul Egensteiner the ways I might utilize my research to provide coaching or mentoring for preachers, such as: offering stand-alone preaching workshops or series of workshops to pastors in various sectors of the MNYS; meeting monthly with small groups of pastors to coach them to meet their own preaching goals; mentoring first-call preachers or interns one-on-one, in person or virtually; and creating a workbook or other practical resource for preaching skills.

I also expect to continue sharpening my preaching and pastoral skills in the congregation where I serve and in my work as Dean of the Delaware-Hudson Conference of the MNYS of the ELCA. I can share this research at synodical theological conferences and in my work in the interfaith community in Newburgh, New York.

I am also open to writing for theological, pastoral, homiletical, or liturgical journals on topics such as: “Speaking about Gender: How to Honor the Identity of Those who Reject the Gender Binary” or “How to Find the Sermon Illustrations Right in Front of You” or “Hospitality to the Stranger: Opening Space for the Other” or “How to Bring the World into Sunday Worship: Engaging a Congregation in Singing Global Songs” or

“How to Receive the Gifts of Children in the Worshipping Community.” I will also consider expanding this thesis into a book (or two or three, since the topic is so broad!), perhaps inviting collaboration among many voices, to continue learning, growing, and sharing these learnings.

### **Personal Insights**

#### Thesis Process as Metaphor for Pastoral Ministry

The process of doing this thesis—with the limits imposed by time and page restrictions, and thus, the inability to dive more deeply into topics I skimmed—reminds me of being a pastor; it is a metaphor for the whole of my pastoring life. Knowing a little of this and a little of that, I have been creating a variety of products (rituals, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, administration) for which I was trained—and other products (counseling, social work, organizational management, fundraising, risk management) for which I had no preparation. While most of us pastors are not professionally trained as fundraising experts, sociologists, anthropologists, psychotherapists, counselors, or social workers, much of our work requires at least a rudimentary knowledge of disciplines other than theology. So we take a little biology, a little psychology, a little knowledge of family systems, a little of this and a little of that, and from that—and from our biblical knowledge, our theological training, our pastoral experience, and our imaginations—we create a witness to the God who loves us and who loves all.

#### Ever-Increasing Circles of Inclusion

When this project began, I started listing people who are othered in our culture: women, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQIA2, and people who live in

poverty. As I read and thought more about boundaries, barriers, and borders, I kept discovering more othered groups to add to the table: people who live with disability, people who are incarcerated, people who have served time, people who are abused, people who have caused abuse to others, people who live with developmental disability, people who are addicted. I do not pretend that my list is exhaustive, but it has been eye-opening.

As I have been writing Chapters 6 and 7, I have encountered another other: Creation. I have realized that, during this year of writing, I have forgotten Creation. I have been othering Creation, upon which my life depends. I have neglected to receive it as a companion, as another creature of God, and inadvertently assumed that my only “hearers” were human hearers. As I think more about this, I am curious to consider how this thesis might be expanded to imagine Creation as a communication partner. What might be needed to have a “dialogue” or exchange with Creation? How might this dialogue affect my learnings? These questions could spark new interest and open possibilities to collaborate with environmentalists, Indigenous Peoples, scientists, and other interpreters of Creation. As I look across the barrier I’ve drawn in the writing of my list, I look up and see him again: Jesus, standing next to Creation, beckoning me to draw the circle ever wider.

### **Professional Insights**

#### Reflection on the Novel Coronavirus

The past two months have given me ample, unexpected opportunity to reflect on boundaries, barriers, and borders, not only because I have been writing this thesis, but

because of the encroachment of the novel Coronavirus<sup>1</sup> upon our daily lives (as it has impacted the lives millions around the world). In the early months of its presence in the U.S.,<sup>2</sup> the boundaries, barriers, and borders around it are changing nearly every day.

#### 1. Boundaries, Barriers, and Borders in the Time of COVID-19

In an attempt to prevent infection of new hosts, we are drawing boundaries around COVID-19. These boundaries are, in fact, attempts to protect us from “impurity.” Daily reports on contamination and infection rates spark fears of those who are “infected,” “contaminated,” and/or “unclean.” Governmental and religious leaders are making plans to erect protective barriers. Physical barriers held against COVID-19 are plentiful: rubbing alcohol, bleach, antiseptic soap, disinfectant wipes, face masks, shields, gowns, and gloves. Social barriers are erected daily: international borders are closed, “Social Distancing” (“6 feet Apart”), “No Travel” and “Stay-at-Home” directives, such as: working from home, from school, and business closings. Symbolic barriers of bullying and hate crimes attempt to rid the society of an invisible enemy; scare tactics or physical violence are being enacted against persons considered “dangerous.” These barriers are “purity rules” for this modern time, but for a different reason than those in ancient Israel of first century Palestine; they are for the sake of public safety, not religion, but they may be misused against those considered to be other.

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<sup>1</sup> The Coronavirus is also currently referred to as COVID-19 or abbreviated as Covid.

<sup>2</sup> “First Travel-related Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Detected in United States,” Center for Disease Control (CDC), 1/21/2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0121-novel-coronavirus-travel-case.html>.

## 2. Blame and Othering

We humans are threatened in this time of global pandemic, and our amygdala are on high alert. That biological basis of othering, the “fight/flight response,” is working overtime. We are anxious, and we want to quell our anxiety, so we need a scapegoat—someone to blame. The President of the United States identified that scapegoat when he called COVID-19 “the Chinese Virus.”<sup>3</sup> The immediate amygdalic<sup>4</sup> response from the American public was “100 Hate Crimes a Day” enacted against Asians in the U.S. in late March of 2020.

Racism against Asian Americans has surged as the coronavirus sweeps the U.S., with reports of hate crimes averaging approximately 100 per day. [These include] a man violently demanding an Asian man on the New York subway move away from him, a man being assaulted in New York for wearing a face mask, the stabbing of three Chinese-Americans at a Sam’s Club in Texas, an Asian man in San Francisco attacked while collecting cans, and a 16-year-old Asian American sent to the hospital after school bullies accused him of carrying the coronavirus.<sup>5</sup>

## 3. “Those People” All Look Alike

Perpetrators of these recent hate crimes choose not to differentiate between Chinese and Asians from other ethnic and national backgrounds. When they see a person they presume to be Chinese, they erect a barrier. They seek to do harm, either to punish

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<sup>3</sup> Katie Rogers, Lara Jakes, and Ana Swanson, “Trump Defends Using ‘Chinese Virus’ Label, Ignoring Growing Criticism,” *The New York Times*, 3/18/2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/politics/china-virus.html>.

<sup>4</sup> I fashioned this word as the adjectival form of “amygdala.” The hate-filled responses to Chinese citizens and residents in the U.S. have arisen not from the “human brain” but from the “monkey brain.” It’s the part of the brain that takes over when are in survival mode. See Heidi Hanna, “Please Meet Your Monkey Mind,” *The American Institute of Stress*, 3/13/2018, <https://www.stress.org/please-meet-your-monkey-mind>.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandra Kelley, “Attacks on Asian Americans Skyrocket to 100 per day Amidst Coronavirus Pandemic,” *The Hill*, published 3/31/2020, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/equality/490373-attacks-on-asian-americans-at-about-100-per-day-due-to>.

the “Chinese” person for having brought the virus to the U.S. or to cast them out so they cannot infect anyone else. According to the FBI, on March 14, 2020, in Midland, Texas, 19-year-old Bernie Gomez allegedly stabbed three members of an Asian-American family "because he thought the family was Chinese, and infecting people with the coronavirus.”<sup>6</sup> Alvin Moua and Vanishia Yang, an Asian-American couple in Minnesota, came home to this note on their door on March 25, 2020:

We’re watching you [racial slur whited out]  
take the chinese (sic) virus back to china (sic).  
We don’t want you hear (sic)  
infecting us with your diseases.<sup>7</sup>

Even though this anonymous rant is a fearful, amygdalic response to difference, our preaching during COVID-19 must counter such messages of hate and bigotry.

#### 4. Suffering: Unequal Opportunity

Of course Chinese and other Asian-Americans are not the only ones who are suffering in this pandemic. The virus makes no distinction between persons based on social location, and no one is immune. Many, many people are suffering. But those who are suffering the most are those who always suffer the most: the frail elderly, the poor, people of color, those who live in disenfranchised or environmentally toxic communities, those who have lost jobs or had hours drastically reduced, those who are incarcerated, those who are homeless, and countless others who are marginalized. These include

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<sup>6</sup> Jakob Brandenburg, “Hear from One of the Men who Stopped the Midland Sam’s Club Attack,” *CBS7*, 3/16/2020, <https://www.cbs7.com/content/news/Hear-from-one-of-the-men-who-stopped-the-Midland-Sams-Club-attack-568848641.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Erin Hassanzadeh, “Coronavirus In Minnesota: ‘We’re Watching You’: Racist Note” Left On Woodbury Home Of Asian American Couple,” *CBS News*, 3/27/2020, <https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2020/03/27/coronavirus-in-minnesota-were-watching-you-racist-note-left-on-woodbury-home-of-asian-american-couple/>.

“essential workers,” needing to work dangerous jobs, lacking the luxury of social distancing, healthcare, or the privilege of staying home when sick. These vulnerable people also have fewer resources to respond to the pandemic than those who have privilege.

How are residents in a home for developmentally disabled adults in Wisconsin to understand why their caregivers no longer hug them? How are those who live in Africa far from water sources or in India with no clean water to even think about the need to wash their hands for 20 seconds 20 times a day? How are sex workers to do their work? How are those in juvenile detention or in immigration detention to stay six feet away from one another? Where are the homeless LGBTQIA2 teenagers in Manhattan to go when shelters have had to reduce capacity due to “Social Distancing” policies?

As the number of people with COVID-19 infections flew past 50,000 in New York City this week, the collateral damage has fallen on the most vulnerable residents. Although they make up an estimated one-third of homeless youth in the city, it has become nearly impossible for young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer to find an available bed in a shelter.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Social Distancing

Are wealthier white, middle-class, educated Americans who have erected barriers against the virus with masks, gloves, and disinfectant wipes also erecting barriers against those who cannot find masks, afford gloves, or drive to another county to buy disinfectant wipes? Some might be inconvenienced about having to stay home or wear masks or bummed about losing our investment income or missing out on the latest movie, but might “Social Distancing” actually be convenient when it provides an excuse not to

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<sup>8</sup> Megan Conn, “Lack of Shelter Bed in New York Leaves LGBTQ Youth At Risk During Pandemic,” *The Chronicle of Social Change*, 4/2/2020, <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/coronavirus/lgbtq-youth-struggle-for-shelter-from-coronavirus/41999>.

confront the pain of neighbors? Might someone who is only comfortable with people who look and speak and think and act like them be a tiny bit grateful to be socially distant from people who are not “like them”?

## 6. Inside and Outside

In one of my questions about boundaries, barriers, and borders in Chapter 1, I asked, “How can our preaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century speak to those who are invisible or hidden, wounded or broken, both inside and outside our faith communities?” On her first read of Chapter 1, my editor asked me, “How do you propose to speak to those outside your congregation?” At the time, I realized I didn’t have much of an answer.

The congregation I serve has chosen to face outward with its website, Facebook page, and a visible outdoor sign on which we share a variety of messages (both informational and inspirational). A renovation was completed in 2008 for the purpose of opening the building to the community. Before COVID-19 closed our doors, we were hosting seven 12-step groups, a support group for grandparents raising grandchildren, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, a Community Choir, and a tax clinic sponsored by the American Association for Retired Persons. Once a week in the summer, we host a Children’s Craft Table on the lawn next to our parking lot while parents enjoy concerts by local musicians—it offers a relaxed way for the congregation to interact with our neighbors.

As a congregation, we have many avenues for meeting neighbors, but neither the members nor I, however, have figured out effective strategies to meet neighbors or invite those who use our space to join our faith community. Thanks to the challenges imposed by COVID-19, we might have to think about it some more. How, indeed, can we speak to

those invisible, hidden, wounded, or broken children of God whom we may (or may not) notice are suffering, even more urgently, both inside and outside our faith communities?

## 7. New Ways of Connecting & Communicating

This pandemic and the policy of Social Distancing, even as it has separated members of congregations from one another, is also providing occasions for different kinds and levels of connection. The last time we gathered physically for Bible Study, one of my parishioners lamented, “I wish they hadn’t called it ‘Social Distancing;’ after all, we can stay physically distant and still be socially connected.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, pastors and rabbis and other religious leaders are all trying to figure out how to promote social connection while we are separated physically.

During this pandemic, most religious leaders are ramping up their capacity for internet-based digital communication. We are setting up e-giving accounts or trying livestream, Zoom, or YouTube for the first time—or, at least, for the first time it is *we* who are managing the platform. We are trying to host meetings or Bible studies or prayer services via Zoom, but so many of us (especially us older pastors) lack digital expertise. We are all on a very steep learning curve; in the midst of adjusting to “Life in a Time of Virus,” we are also trying to figure out how to use new technologies so we can remain socially connected to our parishioners from whom we are physically separated. Some of us can’t afford new equipment, and many of us are receiving fewer donations since the community is not gathering. Some pastors and theologians are projecting that COVID-19

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<sup>9</sup> Michelle Viña-Baltsas, a member of my parish, said this on March 12, 2020, the last time we sat around the table for Bible Study, before the “No Gathering” directive in New York.

may even cause a surge in church closures in the near future.<sup>10</sup> The technical challenges and the financial concerns, as well as the inability to visit people in crisis, are very stressful. We do well to be alert to our amygdalic responses!

Certainly one of the legacies of COVID-19 for faith communities will be that many congregations who were not digitally savvy before develop digital skills and deepen digital footprints. Some will continue livestreaming even after they can gather again. Some will use Zoom periodically for team meetings, emergency council meetings, Confirmation classes, or Bible Study. Others will meet as usual but gather around a laptop to include a member who in is Florida for the winter. Some will discover a new ministry of reaching out into the community through these digital resources. Our efforts to stay connected during the pandemic may allow us to connect more closely with our local community over the long term. Maybe someone who first saw our Easter service on Facebook will eventually come through our doors. Maybe the newcomer who receives a welcome online will join our community and then turn around to share the blessing with the next newcomer. Or maybe they will take time to listen to the long-term member who is ill or newly grieving; maybe the newcomer will offer an established member a gift of community during an illness or upon the death of a spouse. We do not know how, but we do know that this pandemic will change the way churches do ministry moving forward.

Every pastor with whom I have spoken and every pastors' group whom I have met on Zoom in the past few weeks has noted the same pastoral concern: What about those who cannot afford internet fees or do not have a computer or an iPad or lack proper

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<sup>10</sup> See Cameron Trimble, "Ten Ways the Church Will be Changed by COVID-19," *Convergence*, 4/2/2020, [https://convergenceus.org/2020/04/02/ten-ways-the-church-will-be-changed-by-covid-19/?inf\\_contact\\_key=4b464999c6215347de38772d67a77db87e470d92b8b75168d98a0b8cac0e9c09](https://convergenceus.org/2020/04/02/ten-ways-the-church-will-be-changed-by-covid-19/?inf_contact_key=4b464999c6215347de38772d67a77db87e470d92b8b75168d98a0b8cac0e9c09).

software or don't have any experience with screens or do not know where to click or can't find their passwords? How can we stay connected to them? If one of them were suddenly homebound, we would find a donated laptop and a high school student to help them set it up and show them how to find the church service on the website or on Facebook. But we cannot visit our homebound members during this pandemic. We can try helping set them up with guidance over the phone, but some of them cannot follow directions over the phone—or even hear over the phone. How can we connect with these members against whom those seeking to keep all of us safe have erected a barrier? At the very time that we are figuring out how to cross barriers of social distance during this epidemic by utilizing digital communication, are we in danger of erecting barriers against those who do not have access to digital resources?

### **Conclusion: To Hold the Boundary or to Cross the Barrier?**

During Week Three of New York State's "Social Distancing" order, I got a call from my seminary colleague. That morning, after livestreaming the Sunday service from his congregation, he had to think hard and fast about boundaries when his 20-year-old organist asked for a private conversation. He closed the door to his study and offered him a seat. Fighting tears, the young man, still standing, said, "I just need a hug."

My colleague is not usually a hugger. He is a hand-shaker. He was abused by his childhood priest, and so he is vigilant about keeping pastoral boundaries. In these days, he is very careful to practice Social Distancing, but in that ministry moment, aware of his own boundary around hugging and the government-imposed barrier of physical distance, he recognized the need to step over his own boundary and the societal barrier for the sake

of his young neighbor. In that moment, he reached over and gave the anxious young man a hug—a firm and affirming embrace.

Every day we pastors balance precariously in our hearts the tension between holding boundaries and crossing barriers. In split seconds, we have to recognize boundaries, protect the vulnerable, identify barriers, consider consequences, and then decide: “Hold” or “Cross”? May God give us serenity to hold the boundaries that protect, courage to cross the barriers that other, and wisdom to know the difference.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Fred R. Shapiro, “Who Wrote the Serenity Prayer?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 4/28/2014, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Who-Wrote-the-Serenity-Prayer-/146159>.

## APPENDIX 1: TEXT & SERMON ON ACTS 10:1-48

### Sermon titled “Circles of Inclusion”<sup>1</sup> by Mary Lou Baumgartner

#### INTRODUCTION TO ACTS 10:1-48

*Please note: Words underlined indicate the responses I was seeking from the congregation.*

Before we listen to Acts 10, let me give you some background to the Book of Acts. Who knows where to find it? In the New Testament (NT), after the four gospels, before the letters. What exactly is the Book of Acts? It’s not a gospel—why not? Because it doesn’t narrate Jesus’ life and death and resurrection. (Who can name the four gospels? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.) It’s not a letter, either—why not? Like the letters, Acts yields lots of information about the early church, but its form is narrative, not epistle (that’s the fancy word for “letter” in the NT). Simply put, Acts is a story. It’s not a history, exactly, since the author isn’t concerned much with verifiable historical details. Instead, it’s a story about the work of the Holy Spirit who accompanies Jesus’ followers as they tell others about Jesus after his ascension. I’ll repeat that: Acts is a story about the work of the Holy Spirit who accompanies Jesus’ followers as they tell others about Jesus after his ascension. Chief among these followers of Jesus in Acts are whom? There are two: Peter—who’s Peter? A follower of Jesus, one who denied him and was forgiven after his resurrection, and who else? Paul—who’s Paul? A Jewish persecutor of the early

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<sup>1</sup> Preached at King of Kings Lutheran Church, New Windsor, NY, October 2019 for “Acts” course (7578 DMin) taught by Dr. Matthew Skinner at Luther Theological Seminary (June 2019).

Christians who was converted when Jesus spoke to him in vision; he went on to carry the gospel all the way to Rome.

When was Acts written? Generally, scholars agree on a time frame between 80 and 110 C.E./A.D. Who wrote it? Luke. We get two hints in the first paragraph. First, the author refers to a “former volume,” indicating that this is the second volume of a two-volume work. Second, how does he address his reader? As Theophilus. Who knows what other NT book is addressed to Theophilus? Luke. Luke and Acts were written by the same author; traditionally, he is called Luke, although the name “Luke” never appears either in the gospel or the Book of Acts. Theophilus is a Greek name, coming from *Theo*, which means “God” and *Philus*, from *Philia*, which means “lover.” Luke addresses the reader as “Lover of God;” perhaps there was a Greek Christian named Theophilus, or maybe Luke was addressing his two-volume work to you and me, since we, too, are Lovers of God.

After the introductory paragraph, Luke narrates Jesus’ ascension, giving his readers a one-sentence hint of the trajectory and the structure of the whole book. Jesus is standing with his apostles, bidding them farewell, when he says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Can you repeat that after me? You will receive power—You will receive power; when the Holy Spirit comes upon you—when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses—and you will be my witnesses; in Jerusalem—in Jerusalem; in all Judea and Samaria; in all Judea and Samaria; and to the ends of the earth—and to the ends of the earth. Before he ascends into heaven, Jesus sends his apostles out with these words, “You will receive power when

the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The Book of Acts follows that trajectory geographically. Beginning in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, the author narrates the spread of the gospel throughout Judea, then to Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth—Ethiopia and Asia Minor and Rome, to be specific—the very ends of the earth as the apostles understand it. The author also narrates the growth of the church—from 120 believers on Ascension Day to 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost, from then on “the Lord add[ing] to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47) Throughout the book, this geographic and numerical growth is engineered by the Holy Spirit.

Not only is the Holy Spirit growing the church geographically and numerically, it is also expanding the church by overcoming social barriers as well. The author is keen to tell us about this social trajectory: the church is growing toward ever-expanding circles of inclusion. At the beginning of Acts, those in the circle include the first eleven apostles, all of whom are Jews, as is the one who is chosen to replace Judas. The 120 persons who gather to choose Judas’ successor, including Jesus’ mother and brothers—and those added on Pentecost—are all Jews. Until today’s chapter, every believer in Jesus is a Jew, either born as a Jew or converted to Judaism. In this chapter, for the first time in Acts, Gentiles, that is, non-Jews, are added to the church. In Acts 10, the barrier between Jews and Gentiles is exploded; the boundary that keeps them apart is “obliterated” (Skinner). This is where we pick up today’s story.

**CHORAL READING OF ACTS 10:1-48** A reading from Acts, the Tenth Chapter.

Readers: Narrator, Angel, Cornelius, Voice, Peter, Spirit, Servants and Soldier

*Narrator reads from pulpit. Minimal movement to visualize story. Caesarea located at front left pew, Joppa at front right pew, roof of Simon the Tanner's house at chancel steps. Reader representing Angel/Voice/Spirit speaks from chancel.*

**Narrator:** A reading from the Book of Acts, the Tenth Chapter.

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him,

**Angel:** "Cornelius."

**Narrator:** He stared at him in terror and said,

**Cornelius:** "What is it, Lord?"

**Narrator:** He answered,

**Angel:** "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside."

**Narrator:** When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.

Then he heard a voice saying,

**Voice:** "Get up, Peter; kill and eat."

**Narrator:** Peter said,

**Peter:** "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean."

**Narrator:** The voice said to him again, a second time,

**Voice:** "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

**Narrator:** This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him,

**Spirit:** "Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them."

**Narrator:** So Peter went down to the men and said,

**Peter:** "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?"

**Narrator:** They answered,

**Soldier:** "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say."

**Narrator:** So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. But Peter made him get up, saying,

**Peter:** "Stand up; I am only a mortal."

**Narrator:** And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them,

**Peter:** "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

**Narrator:** Cornelius replied,

**Cornelius:** "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say."

**Narrator:** Then Peter began to speak to them:

**Peter:** “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

**Narrator:** While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said,

**Peter:** “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

**Narrator:** So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

## SERMON

We have just witnessed a significant moment in the Book of Acts and “a pivotal event”<sup>2</sup> in the history of Christianity. Scholars call the narrative in this chapter “one of

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<sup>2</sup> Gail O’Day, “Acts,” *Women’s Bible Commentary, Third Edition: Revised and Updated*, eds., Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, Jacqueline E. Lapsley (London: SPCK Publishing, 2012), 306.

the critical points in the entire narrative”<sup>3</sup> and a “climactic moment.”<sup>4</sup> Why? Because Peter’s experience with Cornelius pushes the church outside itself, toward ever-expanding circles of inclusion.<sup>5</sup> The story of the encounter between Peter and Cornelius is climactic, critical, and pivotal because, after this, the early church, Jews who have been following Jesus, must turn outward to welcome Gentiles into the Christian community. Why is this such a significant change? What does it matter that the church now begins to include Gentiles?

It’s hard for us grasp the significance of this change in the posture of the early followers of Jesus, who were still part of the synagogue. Let me have a go at explaining this. For Jews of the first century, situated in the midst of a foreign and pagan Roman occupation, maintaining their Jewish identity was crucial. They did this by studying Torah and following its 613 laws, many of which were purity laws. These purity laws, about eating and drinking, about menstruation and ejaculation, about what went into and out of bodies, were meant to keep the people of Israel pure by separating them from uncleanness. This necessitated a separation of the Jews from the Gentiles, who were unclean, because, if the Jews became defiled by contact with Gentiles, God might flee from God’s people in order to maintain God’s own purity.

Not only the law but the Jerusalem Temple itself was designed to protect God from defilement; it was organized by levels of holiness. God was understood to reside in

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<sup>3</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 130.

<sup>4</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Abingdon New Testament Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 162.

<sup>5</sup> I first noticed the concept of “Ever-Increasing Circles of Inclusion” in a video produced by the Northwestern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the early 1990’s.

the Holy of Holies, at the very center of the Temple. No one entered that space, except for the High Priest—and he only on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Adjacent to the Holy of Holies was the Court of the Priests, and then the Court of the Israelites (reserved for ritually pure Jewish men), and, furthest from the Holy of Holies, the Court of Women, who were frequently impure by menstruation or childbirth. Beyond the central Holy of Holies, each successive area of the Temple was considered less holy; the Temple's architecture restricted access to each Temple court in order to protect God from defilement, whether by women who were unclean from menstruation or men who were unclean from skin disease or blindness or contact with a corpse.

The Gentiles, because of their uncleanness, weren't allowed into the Temple proper. Their space, the Court of the Gentiles, was a series of roofless porches set in a rectangle surrounding the Temple, beyond the Court of Women. There they could purchase sacrificial animals or make monetary offerings, but, because of their uncleanness, they were prohibited from going inside. Jews who ate or drank or otherwise interacted with Gentiles would also become unclean and unable to enter the Temple until they fulfilled rituals of purity.

Today's story from Acts hinges on this dynamic of clean Jews and unclean Gentiles. Cornelius, the first character we meet, is an unclean Gentile. A foreign occupier, he lives in Caesarea, a city built by King Herod on the Mediterranean as a port for Roman trade. A "centurion," the commander of a company of a hundred soldiers of the Roman army, Cornelius is a Gentile—and yet, Luke calls him a "devout man"—or, in some translations, a "God-fearer," because he gives alms generously and prays to God constantly. At the beginning of the story he's ready for God to get his attention; he has a

vision in which he clearly sees an angel of God. This angel directs him to send messengers to Peter to ask him to come to meet Cornelius in Caesarea. He quickly sends his soldier and slaves to carry out the angel's command.

Peter, on the other hand, is a Jew, a Jew who keeps the law, a Jew who is "clean." When the story begins, he is living in Joppa, also a port city on the Mediterranean, about 35 miles south of Caesarea. One of the followers of Jesus, chosen as an apostle to spread the good news of God's love in Jesus to God's people after Jesus' death, Peter is the prime leader of the apostles. Like Cornelius, Peter has a vision and hears a voice, but unlike Cornelius, he does not see clearly. Instead, he is puzzled by his vision. He sees a sheet full of clean and unclean animals and hears a disembodied voice inviting him to eat. Even though he is hungry, he rejects the Voice's offer because he knows that, according to Jewish law, he should not eat anything unclean—and he worries that the unclean animals on the sheet may have contaminated the clean animals. Peter does what is expected of him as a faithful Jew. He chooses to keep the law, so he declines the invitation to lunch, not realizing that he is resisting the work of the Spirit.

At that very moment, when Cornelius' messengers show up, Peter hears the Spirit's command to welcome the three men who have come to see him. So, instead of sending the unclean Gentiles away, he invites them to lodge with him—and presumably to eat with him. The next day he travels with them and a few of the believers from Joppa to Caesarea. When he meets Cornelius, Peter underlines their differences, saying, "Now you know that I shouldn't even be here, associating with unclean Gentiles such as you, but I can't argue with God, who told me that I should call nothing unclean. Why did you send for me?"

Cornelius then tells Peter of his vision and asks Peter to tell the Gentiles gathered at his house what the Lord has told him. At that moment, Peter says, (I imagine somewhat incredulously), “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Then Peter tells the Gentiles in Cornelius’s house the story of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit “comes upon them,” and they begin speaking in tongues. Peter, grasping the meaning of his vision, not only baptizes the Gentile Cornelius and his household, but also stays with them “for several days,” eating and drinking with those whom Torah admonishes him to avoid, breaking the Jewish law for the sake of the gospel.

Peter, who has been so sure that he knows God’s will, now has to “discern [anew] God’s intentions and alter his assumptions”<sup>6</sup> about who may be admitted into the Christian fold. He has to listen to the Holy Spirit, who “dares him to imagine new, unexpected possibilities.”<sup>7</sup> He has to let go of what he knows to be good and right for the sake of what the Spirit is creating. His attitudes have to be adjusted, his practices changed.<sup>8</sup> He has to welcome those whom God sends to him, even Gentiles. He has to make space for strangers, not so that he can mold them into law-abiding Jews, but so that they can hear the story of God’s love in Jesus and begin to follow him, exactly as they are, whether circumcised or not.

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<sup>6</sup> Matt Skinner, *Intrusive God, Disruptive Gospel: Encountering the Divine in the Book of Acts*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015), 85.

<sup>7</sup> Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 86: “Attitudes will have to adjust. Practices will have to expand or change.”

Peter doesn't know it yet, but the church will never be the same again after this critical moment. God is drawing the boundaries of the church wider, making space for the stranger, incorporating the Gentiles into the ever-expanding circle around Jesus. Working behind the scenes, the Holy Spirit is nudging Peter to release his preconceptions, to let go of what is comfortable, to move beyond what is familiar, in order to honor the God-given identity of the stranger Cornelius.<sup>9</sup> In the process, Peter's life—and Peter's faith—changes as he eats and drinks with people whom he can no longer call “unclean.” And the church changes as well; in Cornelius' house full of unclean Gentiles, Peter watches as those who have been so long excluded from the people of God are welcomed home, into God's family.

In Cornelius' house, Peter comes to understand that God shows no partiality. Unlike the judge in today's gospel, the God to whom Peter is re-introduced by Cornelius is a God who doesn't have to be bribed or pestered in order to hear our prayers. To the contrary, God is always willing to listen to God's people, to all of God's people, to any of God's people, anytime. God is even willing to listen to you. Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. Whether you got a raise or lost a job last month. Whether you bombed your SAT or got in to the college of your choice. Whether you cooked a delicious meal or burned dessert yesterday. God is ready to listen to every one of God's people, anytime; God does not show partiality.

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<sup>9</sup> Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 86: “Hospitality entails a host making a commitment to a guest and honoring the guest's identity. For that commitment to be real, it must be demonstrated.”

This is not the same thing as saying, “God is impartial,”<sup>10</sup> as in “God is indifferent; God doesn’t care about you.” God cares, indeed, about you, as you are, whether you are healthy or sick. God cares about you if you are confident—or if you spend endless nights replaying those old tapes in your head, tapes of your teacher or your father saying, “What’s the matter with you? You’ll never amount to anything. You are such a failure; you can’t do anything right”—or maybe they’re tapes you recorded yourself: “I am so stupid. I’ll never make it; I just don’t belong.” God cares about you, as you are, whether you are strong or weak, rich or poor, brilliant in school or struggling, whether your hair is grey or black or brown or red or blond, whether you are full of faith or doubting daily.

The trajectory of Acts, that movement from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, those ever-expanding circles of inclusion, continues its expansive movement today. God still sends visions, challenging God’s people to move beyond their comfort zones. Maybe you have encountered someone who is different from you, for whose sake God called you to move beyond your comfort zone. The model of hospitality that Peter offers us in today’s reading is this: the church endures discomfort for the sake of the stranger. Let me say that again: the church endures discomfort for the sake of the stranger. When you and I encounter strangers, for their sakes, God asks us to endure our discomfort as we bump into the differences between us. Just as the Holy Spirit nudged Peter, the Holy Spirit nudges you and me to release our preconceptions, to let go of what

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<sup>10</sup> Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 83: “God’s impartiality means something other than disinterestedness; it expresses God’s active concern for all humanity and God’s desire to welcome all peoples.”

is comfortable and familiar, to adjust our attitudes and practices, all in order to make space for strangers, not to change them, but to welcome them as they are.

When God sends God's Spirit among God's people, good news gets distributed all around—to everyone. Not just to those who can pay for it, not just to those who have the right set of Scriptures, not just to those who follow the right rules, not just to those who have the right body parts—or the right adjustments to their body parts—but to everyone. Everyone. You can rejoice in that indiscriminate, impartial delivery of the love of God, recognizing that it is for all of God's people—and for you. And when you see that God draws the circle wide enough for you,<sup>11</sup> welcoming you just as you are, calling you “worthy,” you no longer need to draw a small enough circle to find your worth by keeping others out of the circle.

God continues to draw the circle wider, to welcome strangers, not as we wish they would be, but as they are, in their own identity. You and I have the privilege of participating with God in opening the circle, in sharing God's love with others—or of hoarding God's love for ourselves, worried that there's not enough of it to go around. But there is enough—plenty enough love for all. God's circle of love is ever-expanding, never-ending, always ready to include one more. And in that circle there's room for Jew and Gentile, for you, for me, for anyone in need of comfort, of love, of belonging.

AMEN.

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<sup>11</sup> Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 21: “God's promises will extend to people residing in places both familiar and exotic. The circles will widen...”

## APPENDIX 2: PRAYER FOR A PANDEMIC

### **Prayer for a Pandemic<sup>1</sup>**

By Cameron Bellm

*After each petition, you may speak the names of people or groups of people for whom you pray.*

May we who are merely inconvenienced,  
remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors,  
remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home,  
remember those who must choose between  
preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children  
when their schools close  
remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips  
remember those who have no place to go.

May we who are losing our marginal income  
in the tumult of the economic market  
remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home  
remember those who have no home.

During this time when we cannot physically  
wrap our arms around each other,  
let us yet find ways to be  
the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron Bellm, "Prayer for a Pandemic," Krug the Thinker blog, 3/12/2020, <http://krugthethinker.com/2020/03/prayer-for-a-pandemic/>.

## GLOSSARY

**ableism**—Discrimination in favor of able-bodied people<sup>1</sup>

**African-American**—Designation in the U.S. Census of persons “having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.”<sup>2</sup>

**alien**—*adj.* Belonging to a foreign country or nation; unfamiliar and disturbing or distasteful; extraterrestrial; *noun:* a foreigner, esp. one who is not a naturalized citizen of the country where they are living; a being from another world.<sup>3</sup>

**amygdala**—a group of nuclei, or clusters of neurons located in the medial temporal lobe of the brain. It is part of the limbic system and responsible for processing emotions and memory.<sup>4</sup>

**American Indian or Alaska Native**—Designation in the U.S. Census of persons “having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.”<sup>5</sup>

**asexual**—Without sexual feelings or associations.<sup>6</sup>

**Asian-American**—Designation in the U.S. Census of persons “having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, South Asia, and the Indians subcontinent.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Ableism,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/ableism>.

<sup>2</sup> The United States Census Bureau lists this description on their “About Race” page, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “Alien,” Lexico, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/alien>.

<sup>4</sup> “Amygdala,” Britannica, accessed 11/2/2019, <https://www.britannica.com/science/amygdala>.

<sup>5</sup> The United States Census Bureau lists this description on their “About Race” page, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “Asexual,” Lexico, accessed 10/7/2019, <http://english.oxforddictionaries.com/asexual>.

<sup>7</sup> The United States Census Bureau lists this description on their “About Race” page, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>.

**barrier**—A fence or other obstacle that prevents movement or access; a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress.<sup>8</sup>

**bias**—An inclination of temperament or outlook, especially a personal and unreasoned judgment for or against a group of people;<sup>9</sup> inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.<sup>10</sup>

**binary**—Being in a state of one of two mutually exclusive conditions such as on/off, true/ false, presence or absence.<sup>11</sup>

**binary opposition** (or binary system)—A pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning; the system of language and/or thought by which two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another.<sup>12</sup>

**border**—A line separating two political or geographical areas, especially countries; the edge or boundary of something, or the part near it.<sup>13</sup>

**boundary**—A line that marks the limits of an area;<sup>14</sup> something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent; a line drawn to establish an identity or a barrier.<sup>15</sup> Synonyms include border, line, fence, gate, barrier, wall, periphery, frontier, partition, dividing line, DMZ, limit, edge, and fringe.<sup>16</sup>

**cisgender**—Of, relating to, or being a person whose [self-understood] gender identity

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<sup>8</sup> “Barrier,” Lexico, accessed 5/3/2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/barrier>.

<sup>9</sup> “Bias,” Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bias>.

<sup>10</sup> “Bias,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/bias/>.

<sup>11</sup> “Antonyms for Binary,” Synonyms, accessed 9/13/2019, <https://www.synonyms.com/antonyms/binary>.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Greg, “Binary opposition and sexual power in ‘Paradise Lost,’” *The Midwest Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1996, p. 383+, accessed 20 Mar. 2020, <https://go.gale.com/ps/anonymous?id=GALE%7CA18521262&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=00263451&p=AONE&sw=w>.

<sup>13</sup> “Border,” Lexico, accessed 5/3/2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/barrier>.

<sup>14</sup> “Boundary,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/boundary>.

<sup>15</sup> “Boundary,” Merriam Webster, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/boundary>.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Matthew C. Baker for suggesting synonyms for “boundary” in a conversation on 10/24/2017, at Burke Library at Union Seminary.

corresponds to the sex [assigned] at birth.<sup>17</sup>

**colonialism**—The practice of political control over a country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.<sup>18</sup>

**construct**—Something constructed by the mind, such as a theoretical entity or working hypothesis or concept; a product of ideology, history, or social circumstances; an idea or theory containing various conceptual elements, typically one considered to be subjective and not based on empirical evidence.<sup>19</sup>

**Critical Race Theory**—the view that race, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is socially constructed and that race, as a socially constructed concept, functions as a means to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it.<sup>20</sup>

**decolonization**—The action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent.<sup>21</sup>

**deconstruction**—An approach to understanding the relationship between text and meaning;<sup>22</sup> a method of critical analysis of philosophical and literary language which emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and the assumptions implicit in forms of expression. A scholar practicing deconstruction does not assume that what is conditioned by history, institutions, or society is natural.<sup>23</sup>

**epicene**—Having characteristics of both sexes or no characteristics of either sex; of indeterminate sex.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Cisgender,” Merriam Webster, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cisgender>.

<sup>18</sup> “Colonialism,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/colonialism>.

<sup>19</sup> “Construct,” Merriam Webster, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/construct>.

<sup>20</sup> “Critical Race Theory,” Britannica, accessed 3/17/2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory>.

<sup>21</sup> “Decolonization,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/decolonization>.

<sup>22</sup> “Deconstruction,” Wikipedia, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deconstruction>.

<sup>23</sup> “Deconstruction,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/deconstruction>. The concept was originated by the philosopher Jacques Derrida.

<sup>24</sup> “Epicene,” Lexico, accessed 1/31/2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/epicene>.

**exegesis**—Critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of [literature or] Scripture.<sup>25</sup>

**entitlement**—The belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment.<sup>26</sup>

**feminism**—The advocacy of women’s rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes;<sup>27</sup> a the radical notion that women are people.<sup>28</sup>

**gender**—Traditionally, the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity,<sup>29</sup> not fixed at birth or chosen at puberty but fluid throughout life,<sup>30</sup> especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones,<sup>31</sup> and expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, and voice.<sup>32</sup>

**gender-fluid**—of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity is not fixed.<sup>33</sup>

**gender identity**—One’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. internal sense and personal experience of gender.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> “Exegesis,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/exegesis>.

<sup>26</sup> “Entitlement,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/entitlement>.

<sup>27</sup> “Feminism,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/feminism>.

<sup>28</sup> Gender and Development Network, accessed 9/27/2019.

<https://gadnetwork.org/blogs/2013/8/27/feminism-the-radical-notion-that-women-are-people.html>. This definition was advanced by Cheri Kramarae.

<sup>29</sup> “Gender,” Lexico, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/gender>.

<sup>30</sup> “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Definitions,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>.

<sup>31</sup> “Understanding Gender,” Gender Spectrum, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender/>.

<sup>32</sup> “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed 3/20/2020, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>.

<sup>33</sup> “Gender-fluid,” Merriam Webster, accessed 3/22/2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender-fluid>.

<sup>34</sup> “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed 3/20/2020, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>.

**gender expression**—External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.<sup>35</sup>

**gender-queer**—A style or identity that rejects traditional binary concepts of gender identity and/or gender expression;<sup>36</sup> of, related to, or being a person whose gender identity cannot be categorized solely as male or female; being both male and female, neither male nor female, or as falling completely outside these categories.<sup>37</sup>

**gonad**—“primary reproductive gland that produces reproductive cells (gametes). In males the gonads are called testes; the gonads in females are called ovaries”<sup>38</sup>

**heterosexual**—*adj.* Sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex;<sup>39</sup> involving or characterized by sexual attraction between people of the opposite sex; of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire to a person of the opposite sex; of, relating to, or involving sexual intercourse between individuals of opposite sex. *Noun:* a heterosexual person.<sup>40</sup>

**heterosexism**—Discrimination or prejudice by heterosexuals against homosexuals;<sup>41</sup> (rather than homosexuals, any non-heterosexual people); discrimination or prejudice against homosexuals on the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Gender Identity & Expression,” Smart Sex Resource, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://smartsexresource.com/topics/gender-identity-expression>.

<sup>36</sup> “Genderqueer,” Merriam Webster, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genderqueer/>.

<sup>37</sup> “Glossary of Terms,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>.

<sup>38</sup> “Gonad,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 2/4/2020, <https://www.britannica.com/science/gonad>.

<sup>39</sup> “Heterosexual,” Lexico, accessed 9/29/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/heterosexual>.

<sup>40</sup> “Heterosexual,” Merriam Webster, accessed 9/29/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heterosexual>.

<sup>41</sup> “Heterosexism,” Merriam Webster, accessed 9/29/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heterosexism>.

<sup>42</sup> “Heterosexism,” Lexico, accessed 9/29/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/heterosexism>.

**homophobia**—Irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals.<sup>43</sup>

**Indigenous Peoples**—Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place,<sup>44</sup> persons and tribes who are original to an area.<sup>45</sup>

**intersectionality**—The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage;<sup>46</sup> oppression experienced by people (particularly women) in layers, by gender identity, race, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, economic class, etc.<sup>47</sup>

**Latine, LatinX**—Generic, non-gendered terms for persons who speak Spanish and/or have Hispanic heritage, used instead of the feminine “Latina” or the masculine “Latino.”<sup>48</sup>

**LGBTQIA2**—Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

**male gaze**—A manner of treating women's bodies as objects to be surveyed, which is associated by Feminists with hegemonic masculinity, both in everyday social interaction and in relation to their representation in visual media.<sup>50</sup>

**micro-aggression**—Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental communications, whether intentional or unintentional, that transmit hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to a target person individual because they

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<sup>43</sup> “Homophobia,” Merriam Webster, accessed 9/29/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homophobia>.

<sup>44</sup> “Indigenous,” Lexico, accessed 9/29/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/indigenous>.

<sup>45</sup> My definition.

<sup>46</sup> “Intersectionality,” Lexico, accessed 10/14/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/intersectionality>. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term.

<sup>47</sup> My definition.

<sup>48</sup> My definition.

<sup>49</sup> Some people who identify as LGBTQIA2 prefer the generic term “queer,” reclaimed from prejudicial usage.

<sup>50</sup> “Male gaze,” *Oxford Reference*, accessed 3/20/2020, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority>.

belong to a stigmatized group; sexist, racist, or heterosexist indignities sustained by persons of a non-dominant group.<sup>51</sup>

**misogyny**—A hatred of women;<sup>52</sup> dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.<sup>53</sup>

**Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander**—designation in the U.S. Census of “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.”<sup>54</sup>

**non-binary**—Denoting or relating to a gender or sexual identity that is not defined in terms of traditional binary oppositions such as male and female or homosexual and heterosexual;<sup>55</sup> relating to or being a person who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that is neither entirely male nor entirely female;<sup>56</sup> a system in which gender is not an organizing principle.<sup>57</sup>

**other**—*noun*: Someone who does not belong; To make someone an “other,” an outsider, an outcast by categorization or by drawing a boundary that keeps them outside.<sup>58</sup> Used as a verb, “to other,” can mean “to treat or consider (a person or a group of people) as alien to oneself or one’s group (because of different racial, sexual, or cultural characteristics)”<sup>59</sup>

**patriarchy**—Expectation that woman is always in relationship to man, fueled by the

<sup>51</sup> Andrea Boyles, “The Socialization and Comfortableness of Micro-Aggressions,” TED Talk, November 14, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YR8jNtV4BE>. Chester M Pierce introduced this concept at Harvard in 1970.

<sup>52</sup> “Misogyny,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/5/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misogyny>.

<sup>53</sup> “Misogyny,” Lexico, accessed 10/4/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/misogyny>.

<sup>54</sup> United States Census Bureau, “About Race.”

<sup>55</sup> “Nonbinary,” Lexico, accessed 10/6/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/nonbinary>.

<sup>56</sup> “Nonbinary,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/8/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nonbinary>.

<sup>57</sup> My definition, based on Cecilia L. Ridgeway, “Gender as an Organizing Force in Social Relations: Implications for the Future of Inequality,” Chapter 9 in *The Declining Significance of Gender*, Francine Blau, Mary C. Blinton, David B. Grusky, eds., Russell Sage Foundation, 2006, 265-287, Accessed April 4, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610440622](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610440622).

<sup>58</sup> My definition.

<sup>59</sup> “Other,” Merriam Webster, accessed 4/7/2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/other>.

ideology of sexism; social system construct in which man is at center, as agent, as decider and protector, as referent, and in which woman exists only in relation to man.<sup>60</sup>

**Person of Color**—a person who is not white or of European parentage.<sup>61</sup>

**Post-Colonialism**—the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands; a critical theory analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of European imperial power.<sup>62</sup>

**privilege**—A right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor.<sup>63</sup>

**race**—A family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock;<sup>64</sup> a social construct used to divide peoples of the world into red, white, yellow and black categories;<sup>65</sup> categories used to elevate white Europeans and subjugate people of color.<sup>66</sup>

**racism**—A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race;<sup>67</sup> racial prejudice plus power based on privilege; racial bias plus the ability to act upon it.<sup>68</sup>

**racialize**—To make racial in tone or character; characterize or divide according to race.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “The Wright Show,” interview of Katherine Manne by Robert Wright on her book, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, 11/09/2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3cFBH--OKs>.

<sup>61</sup> “Person of Color,” Lexico, accessed 3/31/2020, [https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/person\\_of\\_color](https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/person_of_color).

<sup>62</sup> My definition.

<sup>63</sup> “Privilege,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/5/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/privilege>.

<sup>64</sup> “Race,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/6/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/race>.

<sup>65</sup> My definition.

<sup>66</sup> My definition.

<sup>67</sup> “Racism,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/6/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>.

<sup>68</sup> My definition, based on The People’s Institute’s “Un-doing Racism Training,” May 2017.

<sup>69</sup> “Racialize,” Lexico, accessed 10/6/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/racialize>.

**racialization**—The process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a relationship or social practice, or group that did not identify itself as such;<sup>70</sup> the act or process of imbuing a person with a consciousness of race distinctions or of giving a racial character to something or making it serve racist ends.<sup>71</sup>

**sex**—Sexual activity, including specifically sexual intercourse; either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans... are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions.<sup>72</sup>

**sex worker**—an individual who engages “in sex work, regardless of whether they do so by choice, circumstance, or coercion.... [The term] “Sex worker” replaces the outdated term “prostitute.”<sup>73</sup>

**sexism**—Prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex;<sup>74</sup> behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.<sup>75</sup>

**sexual abuse**—The infliction of sexual contact upon a person by forcible compulsion.<sup>76</sup>

**sexual expression**—The ways [a person] communicates and presents [self] to the world as a sexual being; expression of sexual thoughts, feelings, desires, fears, hopes, and dreams; [elements include] sexual behavior, sexual orientation, sexual orientation, and gender.<sup>77</sup>

**sexual identity**—Sense of self as a sexual being, including components of biological sex, gender identity, social sex-role, and sexual orientation.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “Racialization,” Wikipedia, accessed 10/6/2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racialization>.

<sup>71</sup> “Racialization,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/5/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racialization>.

<sup>72</sup> “Sex,” Lexico, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sex>.

<sup>73</sup> “What We Do,” Sex Workers Project, accessed 4/6/2020, <https://sexworkersproject.org/info/>.

<sup>74</sup> “Sexism,” Lexico, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sexism>.

<sup>75</sup> “Sexism,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/7/19, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexism>.

<sup>76</sup> “Sexual abuse,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/legal/sexual%20abuse>.

<sup>77</sup> Cory Silverberg, “Sexual Expression,” Live About, updated 11/04/2017, <https://www.liveabout.com/sexual-expression-2982575>.

<sup>78</sup> Shively MG, et al. “Components of Sexual Identity,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, (1977) Fall; 3(1):41-8. doi:10.1300/J082v03n01\_04 .

**sexual harassment**—Uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature especially by a person in authority toward a subordinate (an employee or student).<sup>79</sup>

**sexual orientation**—An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people;<sup>80</sup> description of the categories of people to whom one is attracted and with whom one wants to have relationships (i.e., heterosexual or straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual and asexual).<sup>81</sup>

**sexuality**—Capacity for sexual feelings; a person’s sexual orientation or preference; sexual activity.<sup>82</sup>

**social construct**—An idea created and accepted by the people in a society;<sup>83</sup> A concept or perception of something based on the collective views developed and maintained within a society or social group; a social phenomenon or convention originating within and cultivated by society or a particular social group, as opposed to existing inherently or naturally;<sup>84</sup> social constructs include marriage, family, government, race, gender, illness, religion, technology, and education.<sup>85</sup>

**transgender**—Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and

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<sup>79</sup> “Sexual Harassment,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexual%20harassment>; see also: “Sexual Harassment Study Manual,” Clinical Assessments by Prophecy, a Division of Prophecy Healthcare, Inc., 2015, [https://nt.prophecyhealth.com/Docs/manuals/Sexual\\_Harassment\\_Study\\_Manual\\_2015.pdf](https://nt.prophecyhealth.com/Docs/manuals/Sexual_Harassment_Study_Manual_2015.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed 3/31/2020, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>.

<sup>81</sup> My definition, paraphrased from Planned Parenthood, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/sexual-orientation>.

<sup>82</sup> My definition, paraphrased from Planned Parenthood, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/sexual-orientation>.

<sup>83</sup> “Social Construct,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20construct>.

<sup>84</sup> “Social construct,” Lexico, accessed 10/7/2019, [https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/social\\_construct](https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/social_construct).

<sup>85</sup> Jane Paolantonio, “11 Things That are Social Constructs,” The Odyssey, 10/18/2016, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/social-constructs>.

gender does not correspond with their birth sex;<sup>86</sup> an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned...at birth.<sup>87</sup>

**white**—designation in the U.S. Census of people “having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa”.<sup>88</sup>

**white privilege**—the fact of people with white skin having advantages in society that other people do not have.<sup>89</sup>

**xenophobia**—dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries;<sup>90</sup> fear and hatred of strangers or of foreigners;<sup>91</sup> fear or dislike of the customs, dress, etc., of people who are culturally different from oneself.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> “Transgender,” Lexico, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/transgender>.

<sup>87</sup> “Understanding the Transgender Community,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/understanding-the-transgender-community>.

<sup>88</sup> The United States Census Bureau lists this description on their “About Race” page, accessed 9/27/2019, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>.

<sup>89</sup> “White privilege,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/white-privilege>.

<sup>90</sup> “Xenophobia,” Lexico, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/xenophobia>.

<sup>91</sup> “Xenophobia,” Merriam Webster, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia>.

<sup>92</sup> “Xenophobia,” Dictionary.com, accessed 10/7/2019, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/xenophobia?s=t>.

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