

Introduction and Acknowledgments

Week after week preachers use words. We read them, we write and speak them. We look for the exact words for the moment. They are our means for doing: celebration, lament, explanation, remembrance, justification, anticipation, beseeching, condemnation, comfort. This is all to say that words are our medium for the proclamation of the good news of the Triune God whom we know through Christ Jesus. For most of us this word work is still done through the oral medium of speech. But even preachers who make use of computerized visuals, display screens, and musical interludes still work with words.

We do all of this work in a time of word inflation and overuse. Words do not carry the same stock they once did. But they are our coinage. So chapter 1 looks at the care we must show in choosing and handling words. Chapter 2 maps certain theories of language as a way of exploring the tension between the function of language: Does it reflect or create reality? Chapter 3 presents steps for weekly sermon preparation that help preachers pay attention to word choices. Chapter 4 is a case study of a sermon with commentary about word choices. Chapter 5 is a glossary of additional ways words are used in sermons.

This book is part of a series, and so I depend on readers to put these words in conversation with the other volumes of *Elements of Preaching*. Moreover, this book is for continuing conversation: the glossary is not exhaustive but should stimulate critical thought about how we use words; the map of language theories is only a nod in the direction of linguistic complexities, but it should raise good questions about our intentions; the other chapters should generate reflection about how careful we are with the content of our speech and in our preparations for preaching speech.

It is an honor to have been asked to work on this project, and I am indebted to David Lott and O. Wesley Allen for that invitation. Wes is an insightful, supportive, and unflappable editor and colleague. And it is a great thing to work again with Fortress Press editor David Lott.

I began this book during my academic sabbatical in 2007–2008; I am grateful to President Theodore J. Wardlaw, Dean Michael Jinkins, and the Trustees of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary for sabbatical time.

I also extend my thanks to another seminary community; I was one block away from San Francisco Theological Seminary during those sabbatical months and the faculty and staff folded me in as a visiting professor. I am grateful to the people of St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in America, San Anselmo, who gave my husband and me housing and cheered me on. And in particular to their archpriest, the Very Reverend Stephan Meholick, who was a constant homiletics and liturgics conversation partner. There are those who have shaped the way I think about words; some of them are William and Catherine Lord, Louise Lord Nelson, George P. Rice, the people of First Presbyterian Church of Waterville, New York, Gordon Lathrop, Gail Ramshaw, and my writing partner Melinda Quivik. I give thanks for my husband who is a collaborator in adventure. It is not a small thing to live in mutual forbearance throughout a writing project. Casey Alan Clapp blesses me each day. Finally, I had the gift of living close to my two homiletics mentors: Jana Childers and Linda Clader. They live by what they say. They know there is no such thing as a synonym. And they are committed to the yoke of saying the right words. This book is dedicated to them.