

Reviews

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Preaching Mark. By Bonnie Bowman Thurston. Fortress Resources for Preaching, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.

This short commentary aims to help preachers move from text to sermon. It follows the lectionary divisions of Mark, but Thurston also helpfully includes discussions of the major thematic/literary sections of Mark so that smaller pericopae are set in their proper context. There is also a brief introduction to the Gospel, dealing with typical issues of date, authorship, and audience.

Thurston's commentary is audience-focused, a good choice for a sermon-starting book. She frequently asks how a story would have sounded to the hearers, whom she takes to have been lower-class persons delighted to hear about Jesus' problems with the elite of his world. She also notes points where stories would have appealed to persecuted Roman Christians: the wild beasts of the temptation, the darkness and terror of the storm of chapter 6, and the martyrdom of John the Baptist.

Professor Thurston's homiletical insights are very helpful. Commenting on 6:30-44, she notes that is important "in an overworked, stressed-out, and consequently burned-out world (and church!)...to highlight those places where Jesus invites, in fact, commands his followers to withdraw and to rest" (79). She goes on to compare followers of Christ to the bread and fish broken and given to feed the masses: "precisely then we become the body of Christ, as in our brokenness, we are blest and given to others" (79). Her interpretive line often, like Mark, puts the spotlight on the nameless, powerless characters; of the Syrophenician woman, she writes, "This 'uppity woman' is an example of faith; she exhibits the courage of those who have little to lose and can act on behalf of others for the sake of wholeness and liberation" (89).

In pursuit of the theme of liberation, the author treats the purity laws as burdens from which to be freed rather than as important cultural identity markers. Of the woman with the issues, Thurston writes "it separates her from the community because it makes her and anyone she comes in contact with 'unclean' and 'defiled.' Mark's candor tells us not only that she had suffered physically for twelve years, but that she had been ostracized from the

community, from ordinary human contact (and sexual contact if she were married), and from the worshipping life of Israel" (65). Actually, the story proves the opposite. If the people of the village knew her and ostracized her, then there would have been a space around her when she reached forward to touch Jesus, and there would have been no mystery about who had done it. True, the woman's uncleanness was contagious, but hardly fatal; those touched could have immersed in the local miqveh or in the lake and have been clean by sundown (many observant Jews may well have done this routinely every evening).

Professor Thurston includes suggestions for further reading at the end of each periscope. The book includes an appendix listing the Markan lectionary readings from the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Common Lectionaries, and has an index of Scripture citations. I recommend this book for any pastor or Bible teacher as a way to get the creative processes going.

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