

**African American Prophetic Preaching**  
**Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary**  
**Thursdays 6:00-9:00 p.m.**  
**Schlegel Hall 120**  
**Spring 2019**

**Instructor:****Debra J. Mumford****Email: dmumford@lpts.edu****Office: 203 Schlegel Hall**

During the decades of African/African American enslavement, biblical preaching was often used to justify and maintain the institution of slavery. African American prophetic preaching evolved from the experiences of enslaved Africans who chose to believe in a God of liberation – A God who loved them for who they were and who created them to be a free people.

Black rhetorical traditions will be delineated and identified through study of African American preachers and sermons from the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries. Unique characteristics such as call and response, celebration in preaching, and black hermeneutics will be explored. Each student will be required to preach one sermon using African American preaching traditions as a model.

**By the end of the course (course objectives):**

- 1) Students will understand how African American Preaching traditions evolved out of the West-African North American slave trade (SLO3)
- 2) Students will learn and develop black hermeneutics (SLO1)
- 3) Students will understand the unique characteristics of black preaching such as call and response and celebration. (SLO9)
- 4) Students will give evidence that they are conscious of multiple forms of oppression and injustice (SLO7)
- 5) Students will understand and be able to employ rhetorical skills used in black preaching (SLO16)
- 6) Students will understand the relationship between preaching and social issues in contemporary cultures (SLO5)

**Required Text/Readings:**

Blount, Brian K. *Then Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

McMickle, Marvin. *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.

Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 2013.

Thomas, Frank A. *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018.

## All other readings will be posted on CAMS

### Assignments

1. Students are required to attend every class session and actively participate in class discussions. (10%)
2. Each student is required to submit reviews of any two books on the weekly reading list. 2-3 double-spaced paged reviews must address the following:
  - a. *Overview of the book's main theme and most important points*
  - b. *How this book could have been better or more useful*
  - c. *How this book is helpful for your own prophetic preaching*

**Due February 21, March 14 (10%)**
3. Each student will make a 15-20 minute presentation on current socio-economic or political issues affecting African Americans which they feel need to be addressed in African American prophetic preaching. Issue may be one of the concerns in the 2018 [National Urban League State of Black America](#) Report. Details that need to be included in the presentation are:
  - a. *What is the issue or concern?*
  - b. *How long has issue or concern existed in African American communities?*
  - c. *Which populations of the African American community does the issue effect most?*
  - d. *How does failure to resolve the issue or concern impact African American communities now and in the future?*
  - e. *Why should resolution of the issue or concern matter to those professing to be Christians or people of God? (10%)*

**Due April 11**
4. Each student will submit two reviews of assigned sermons. Use the sermon evaluation form included in syllabus. (10%) **Due February 28, March 28**
5. Each student will submit one 7-10 page exegetical paper on a scripture passage listed on this syllabus. The passages chosen should be the same passages used to develop the sermons. (30%) **Due April 25**
6. Each student will also preach one 15-20 minute sermon. Along with the sermon, each student must submit a transcript or outline of the sermon along with details about the preaching context, occasion, and hearers. (30%) **Due May 9**

**\*All assignments should be submitted by email by the start of class on the due date.**

### Scripture Passages for Exegetical Papers

Each student must choose one of the following scripture passages for exegetical papers. Texts chosen for exegesis are the same text students will use for their sermons.

Genesis 37:26-36 • **(Joseph)**

Exodus 14:21-31 • **(Crossing the Red Sea)**

Exodus 32:10 • **(The Golden Calf)**

2 Samuel 11:1-27 • **(David and Bathsheba)**

1 Kings 3:16-28 • **(Solomon and the Baby)**

Ezekiel 37:1-14 • **(Valley of Dry Bones)**

Luke 15:11-32 • **(Prodigal Son)**

Luke 19:1-10 • **(Jesus and Zaccheus)**

John 6:1-14 • **(Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand)**

Acts 9:1-18 • **(Conversion of Saul)**

Acts 16:25-40 • **(Paul and Silas in Jail)**

Ephesians 6:10-20 • **(The Whole Armor of God)**

## February 7 – Class Meeting

Introduction to the course and students

What is Prophetic Preaching and Why is it Important? – Chapter 1

What are the Issues of Justice and Righteousness? – Chapter 2

**McMickle, Marvin.** *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.

What Is Black Preaching?

“The Search for Distinctiveness in Black Preaching”

**LaRue, Cleophus James.** *The Heart of Black Preaching.* 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. pp. 9-29, 131-137

Chapter One

**Thomas, Frank A.** *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018.

## February 14

African American Biblical Hermeneutics

Chapters 2 & 3

**Thomas, Frank A.** *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018.

Vincent Harding. “The Anointed Ones: Hamer, King, and the Bible in the Southern Freedom Movement.” pp. 537-545

## February 21

“Introduction: The Power of Black Women Preachers” and “Julia Foote” in

**Collier-Thomas, Bettye.** *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979.* 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998. pp. 1-9, 57- 68

Chapters 1

**Thomas, Frank A.** *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching.* Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 2013.

“Liberation as Lens” 13-22

“Reconfigured Ethics” 23-44

“The Synoptic Gospels: Kingdom Ethics” 45-92

**Blount, Brian K.** *Then Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

## Book #1 Review Due

**February 28**

“John: The Christology of Active Resistance” 93-118

“Paul: Theology Enabling Liberating Ethics—Sometimes” 119-157

**Blount, Brian K.** *Then Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

**Review of Exegetical Paper Guidelines**

Sermon Review

**March 7**

“Explaining What the Text Means” 42-48

Sermon: “God Uses Weak People” 49-58

“Encountering the Text” 59-66

Sermon: “Encounters with Jesus from Dying to Life” 67-73

**LaRue, Cleophus James.** *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

“Revelation: The Witness of Active Resistance” 158-184

“New Testament Ethics Through an African American Lens: Some Concluding Thoughts” 185-191

**Blount, Brian K.** *Then Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

**March 14**

“From ‘Moral Values’ to Biblical Justice” - Chapter 3

“From Biblical Prophets to Patriot Pastors” – Chapter 4

**McMickle, Marvin.** *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.

**Celebration**

Chapters 2, 3, & 4

**Thomas, Frank A.** *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching.* Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 2013.

Book Review # 2 Due

**March 21**

Research and Study Week

Read Chapter 4

**Thomas, Frank A.** *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018.

**March 28**

Discuss Chapter 4 “How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon”

“When Prophetic Preaching Gives Way to Praise” Chapter 5

**McMickle, Marvin. *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.**

Chapters 5 & 6

**Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching.* Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 2013.**

Sermon Review

**April 4**

“From Prophets to Profits: Reflections on the Prosperity Gospel” – Chapter 6

**McMickle, Marvin. *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.**

**Read entire book and closely review charts and graphs**

Morial, Marc H. *Locked Out: Education, Jobs, and Justice.* New York, NY: National Urban League, 2018. [National Urban League State of Black America Report.](#)

**April 11**

**Student Presentations - Current Issues for African American Prophetic Preaching**

**April 18**

**Holy Week Break**

**April 25**

Read pages 79-136

**Mitchell, Henry H. *Celebration and Experience in Preaching.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.**

**Exegetical Papers Due****May 2**

“Speaking the Truth in Love: Strategies for Prophetic Proclamation” – Chapter 3

**Tubbs Tisdale, Lenora. *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010.**

“Remnant Prophets for a Remnant People” – Chapter 7

“Under God is a Good Place to Be” – Chapter 8

**McMickle, Marvin. *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.**

**Sermon Manuscripts Due**

**May 9 – Class Meeting - Sermon Presentations**

## Exegesis for African American Prophetic Preaching

- I. Getting the Text in View **(3 point)**
  - a. **Selecting the text (clearly indicate why you chose your particular text)**
  - b. Consider where the text begins and ends **(indicate chapter and verses that will be used for the paper)**
  - c. Establish a reliable translation of the text (indicate which translation of the biblical text you will use, **compare at least three translations of the text to help make your decision or make your own translation. Indicate which translations you used for comparison and why you made your particular choice)**)
- II. Getting Introduced to the Text **(4 points)**
  - a. Read the text for basic understanding **(look up important terms and phrases in bible dictionaries, bible encyclopedias, or lexicons)**
  - b. Place the text in its larger context **(determine what is happening in the text surrounding the passage selected for exegetical work and how the selected passage fits within it)**
- III. Attending to the Text **(10 points)**
  - a. Listen attentively to the text
    - i. Ask penetrating questions of the text
    - ii. Examine the text using the lens of African Americans in a particular socio-economic context or set of circumstances. Provide a brief (5-7 sentences) about the context.
- IV. Testing What is Heard in the Text **(pursue at least two of the questions or trains of thought you raised in “Attending to the Text” using biblical commentaries and extra biblical sources). (10 points)**
  - a. For example, responding to your questions may necessitate that you research the text historically (socio-historical/cultural), theologically, or from a rhetorical or literary point of view.
  - b. Check text in commentaries
  - c. **Consult resources about African American history or contemporary concerns**
  - d. “Moving Toward the Sermon:” State the claim of the text upon the hearers and preacher
- V. Sermon Theme **(3 point)**  
Write a sermon theme that is twelve words or less  
(should be a declarative statement)

**Sermon Content Evaluation**

Preacher \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>Reach/Trim</b> Amount of biblical/exegetical material need to make the sermon understandable to hearers. Just enough exegetical material to illuminate the point/theme of the message. Interprets scripture critically and imaginatively (slo1).</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Introduction</b> Arouses interest of the listeners and is related directly to the theme</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Transitions</b> Are transitions from one part of the sermon to the next smooth and easy for hearers to follow • Introduction to the main body • Between parts of the main body • Main body to the conclusion</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Theology</b> Is the theology consistent throughout sermon and easy to understand? Does it reflect the views of faith community being addressed? Does preacher demonstrate understanding of multiple theological perspectives (historical and contemporary)? (slo3) Is preacher able to clearly articulate what she/he believes? (slo15)</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Language Appropriateness</b> Uses language that lay people can understand and is appropriate for the occasion. Sermon given color and life by descriptive speech.</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Application</b> How is main theme of sermon relevant to lives of hearers? Use concrete examples of how the main theme of sermon makes a difference to the listeners. Does student demonstrate consciousness of multiple forms of oppression and injustice? (slo7)</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Conclusion</b> End sermon by issuing a challenge, posing questions, or encouraging celebration all related to the sermons central theme</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Theme</b> There is one theme only and it is easy for listeners to follow</p> <hr/> <hr/>

**Sermon Delivery Evaluation**

**Preacher** \_\_\_\_\_

<p>Body (hands, feet, posture)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Movement in/around designated preaching space</p> <hr/>
<p>Eye Contact and Facial Expressions</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>How did preacher use elements of speech (rate variance, use of pause, inflection, stress and arrangement of words)</p> <p><b>Circle One)</b></p> <p>Excellent      Good      Fair      Poor</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>What was the general Sermon Flow/Structure? Did student demonstrate ability to reason, read, write and speak clearly (Expository, Homiletical Loop, Four Pages, etc.) (slo16)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Other Comments</p> <hr/> <hr/>



## Other Expectations

### Mutual Purpose

1. **We need to understand about our conversations in class is that we have a mutual purpose.** Our mutual purpose is open dialog about our understandings of God and how our various understandings of God shape the ways we all live and believe. We want to make sure all voices are heard rather than proving ourselves rights or someone else wrong.
2. Open dialog does not mean that people can say anything. We must never use language that disparages or demeans other people in any way.

### Mutual Respect

1. The key to true open dialog is Mutual Respect. If people perceive that others people do not respect them, the conversation disintegrates. Disrespect can be experienced through words and actions (body language). Signs that mutual respect has been violated include name-calling, loud speech/yelling, threats and negative body language (i.e. eye rolling, finger pointing, back turning, etc.).
2. Mutual respectful actions are difficult to perform when we don't respect people because of their opinions or behavior. To actually achieve a level of mutual respect with people whose opinions we view as radical or extreme, we should try to sympathize and even empathize with their points of view.
3. Mutual respect means we don't just appear to be listening to what someone is saying. We are actually listening.

### Written Assignments (points will be deducted to improper formatting)

1. All written assignments should be doubled-spaced.
2. All margins should be **1-inch (left, right, top, bottom)**.
3. All ideas and thoughts that are not original should be footnoted. Each footnote should begin a new line, **indented the same amount as paragraphs. Examples:**

#### (Book)

Eiesland, Nancy L., and Don E. Saliers. *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998, 202.

#### (Journal Article)

<sup>2</sup> Audrey Smedley and Brian Smedley, "Race as Biology Is Fiction: Racism as a Social Problem Is Real." *American Psychologist* 60, no. 1 (2005): 17.

#### (Website)

<sup>3</sup>Oral Roberts: Celebrating the Life of Oral Roberts: The Man Who Obeyed God. <http://www.oralroberts.com/oralroberts/> (accessed March 22, 2010).

4. 12 point font.
5. Spell check all assignments before submitting.

6. Do not include a cover page or place papers in folders.
7. Staple pages of exegetical papers together.
8. Include a header or footer with student name, submission date, and page numbers on each page.

**All assignments should be submitted by email by the start of class on the due date. Assignments submitted late will be penalized twenty five percent per day.** The only exceptions for late work being penalized are in **cases of medical emergency or death in the family**. Preaching dates are pre-assigned. If there is a conflict with the preaching date, see instructor at least two weeks prior to preaching date. Except in the event of a catastrophe or emergency, failure to preach on the assigned date will result in a grade of “zero” for that sermon.

### **Inclusive Language (Adapted from LPTS Student Handbook)**

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities.

The way you phrase a message is often as important as the message itself. The practice of using inclusive language is something more than remembering a list of grammatical and stylistic "things to avoid" - it is a commitment thoughtfully to choose words that will make all people feel welcomed. We want to include not exclude. This is particularly important in preaching when we are communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Why bother to avoid gender-specific language?**

Traditionally, writers have used masculine identifiers and pronouns to address the idea of the "Universal Singular" - terms like "mankind," "men of faith" "Master" - and so on. For centuries, the patriarchal systems of many societies were reinforced by the use of the masculine pronoun referent "he." Because of the use of masculine language, women were, in the main, considered less than men or simply not considered at all. **If we believe that all people are equal in the eyes of God, our language must reflect this belief.** Our language shapes our culture-and to be systematically denied recognition has a rather disenfranchising effect on all people affected.

### **Plagiarism (Adapted from LPTS Student Handbook)**

Whether you summarize the ideas of others or use direct quotes, you must document the source. Where citations are required, they shall follow the form of the latest edition of Turabian/ Chicago Manual of Style.

In your research papers, you must document any information that is not “universally known” or that you did not know before your investigation of the subject. Any use of information without proper documentation is considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is not only unethical but also illegal. Ignorance is not an excuse.

**When a professor judges a student's work to have been plagiarized, or to be subject to academic dishonesty, the following steps will be taken:**

1. The professor and the student will have a consultation in which the exercise in question and the issue of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be discussed.
2. If it is clearly determined that a student has plagiarized or used dishonest academic methods in preparing an exercise, **the grade for that particular piece will be judged an "F" or numerical grade of zero. Any opportunity to redo the exercise is left to the discretion of the professor.**
3. The professor will promptly notify the Dean about the incident of plagiarism or academic dishonesty. Such notification will be confidential communication among the professor, the Dean, and the student.
4. **Two incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty by the same student will be grounds for dismissal from the Seminary.**
5. A Student wishing to appeal the judgment of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may use the established procedures for appealing grades.

## Bibliography

- Blount, Brian K. *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- Chalmers, Aaron. *Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the Worlds of the Prophets*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
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- Wimbush, Vincent L., and Rosamond C. Rodman. *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. New York: Continuum, 2000.