

USING NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS  
TO DETERMINE PATTERNS OF MEANING IN THE SERMON LANGUAGE  
OF WOMEN PREACHERS

by

Pamela Davis Hopkins

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Co-Chairs: Dr. Donna L. Lillian and Dr. Dana Harrington

Major Department: English

Throughout Western history, women preachers have been marginalized. Even though women have filled the pews as members of the congregation, acted as Sunday school teachers, cooks, and members of the choir, in addition to coordinating bake sales and other fund raising events, men have customarily held the leadership positions. In 1853, Antoinette Brown Blackwell became the first woman to be ordained in the Congregationalist Church. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women are still fighting to preach from the pulpit. More women than ever before are entering seminaries, but not all of those women will receive a call from a church. Some of those women who do receive a call will encounter resistance from male colleagues, bosses, church hierarchy, and even congregational members. While the struggle of women preachers to gain access to the pulpit is not the focus of this study, it is important to recognize that struggle, and it is interesting to wonder how that struggle might be reflected in the lives and work of female preachers. Therefore, this study examines the sermon language of women preachers. Specifically, it uses narrative analysis to look for patterns of meaning evident in the language employed by the women preachers as they attempt to adapt to the traditionally male-dominated occupation of preaching. Two of the sermons under consideration in this dissertation come from 19<sup>th</sup>- century women preachers, and eight of the sermons come from 21<sup>st</sup>- century women preachers. Two forms of analyses are used: a narrative analysis to determine whether each sermon utilizes the six elements of narrative structure designated by William Labov (abstract, orientation complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda), and a discourse analysis based

on the work of James Paul Gee who suggests asking questions based around seven building tasks, using six tools of inquiry. The results of the analyses illustrate that each of these women preachers utilize Labov's narrative structure, although each preacher modifies the structure to create her sermon discourse, and that women preachers utilize their sermon language to construct significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, sign systems, and knowledge. None of these women create a sermon discourse that highlights her own struggle to become a preacher. Instead, each preacher creates a sermon discourse that focuses on the Bible text for the day and her interpretation of that text. In short, each of these women preaches like a preacher and not like a woman.

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OF WOMEN PREACHERS

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by

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Pamela Davis Hopkins

APPROVED BY:

CO-DIRECTOR OF DISSERTATION: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Donna L. Lillian

CO-DIRECTOR OF DISSERTATION: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Dana Harrington

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Richard Taylor

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Derek F. Maher

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Jeffrey Johnson

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Paul J. Gemperline

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, the Reverend Thomas C. Davis, Jr., the most outstanding preacher I have ever heard, and to my mother, Frances Benning Davis, the bravest woman I have ever known.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Looking Back: The 19 <sup>th</sup> Century .....	7
Views on Women Preachers in the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century.....	10
Women Preaching Today .....	13
Rationale for This Study .....	19
This Study .....	22
Conclusion .....	29
CHAPTER 2: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: THE DATA .....	30
Introduction .....	30
Linguistic Approaches to Narrative Analysis .....	30
Labov’s Narrative Structure .....	32
Sermons as Narratives .....	35
The Data .....	37
Sermon 1: The Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, “The Faith is Plain”, John 3:14, 15; September 30, 1877 .....	37
S1-Summary .....	37
S1-Structure .....	39
Sermon 2: Lucretia Mott, “The Truth of God...The Righteousness of God”, Marlboro Chapel, Boston; September 23, 1841.....	40
S2-Summary .....	41
S2-Structure .....	42



Sermon 3: The Reverend Melissa Frazier, “God’s Favorite Child”, Luke 15:11, 12; January 10, 2010.....	44
S#3-Summary .....	44
S#3-Structure .....	45
Sermon 4: The Rev. Melissa Frazier, “What Do You Need?” John 2:1-11, February 28, 2010.....	47
S#4-Summary .....	47
S#4-Structure .....	48
Sermon 5: The Rev. Lucy Lind Hogan, “Important Nobodies”, Proper 27B (Lectionary Year B, part of a prescribed reading on a three-year cycle for every Sunday in the year: year B focuses on Mark), November 8, 2009.....	50
S#5-Summary .....	50
S#5-Structure .....	51
Sermon 6: The Rev. Lucy Lind Hogan, “Matters of Death and Life”, Proper 8B, (Lectionary Year B, part of a prescribed reading on a three-year cycle for every Sunday in the year: year B focuses on Mark), Mark 5:21-43, June 28, 2009.....	53
S#6-Summary .....	53
S#6-Structure .....	54
Sermon 7: The Rev. Shauna Hannan, Sermon from the ELCA Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly (no title), Acts 11: 1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35, May 2010.....	56
S#7-Summary .....	56
S#7-Structure .....	57
Sermon 8: The Rev. Shauna Hannan, Written for Holy Cross Day (no title); John 3:13-17; September 18, 2008.....	58
S#8-Summary .....	58
S#8-Structure.....	59

Sermon 9: The Rev. Wanda Neely, “When Christmas Comes for Everyone”, Micah 5:2-5a; Philippians 2: -11, December 20, 2009.....	60
S#9-Summary .....	60
S#9-Structure .....	61
Sermon 10: The Rev. Wanda Neely, “Fleeing From the Presence of the Lord?”; Psalm 139:7-10; Jonah 1:7-10, February 28, 2010.....	63
S#10-Summary .....	63
S#10-Structure .....	64
Discussion .....	66
CHAPTER 3: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: THE DATA .....	71
Introduction .....	71
Gee’s Theory of Discourse Analysis .....	72
Sermons as Discourse .....	76
The Data .....	77
Discussion .....	99
CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS .....	103
Introduction .....	103
Summary of Narrative Analysis .....	103
Summary of Discourse Analysis .....	105
Strengths and Weaknesses of Frameworks Used .....	107
Observations of Sermons and Preachers .....	109
Limitations of Study .....	112
Future Study .....	113
Conclusion .....	114

REFERENCES .....	118
APPENDIX A: SERMONS.....	122
APPENDIX B: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS .....	196
APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER .....	233

LIST OF TABLES

1. Summary of Labovian Structural Elements Present in Sermons Analyzed.....	38
2. Summary of Building Task #1, Building Significance.....	78
3. Summary of Building Task #2, Building Activities.....	85
4. Summary of Building Task #3, Building Identities.....	87
5. Summary of Building Task #4, Building Relationships.....	90
6. Summary of Building Task #5, Building Politics.....	92
7. Summary of Building Task #6, Building Connections.....	95
8. Summary of Building Task #7, Building Significance for Sign Systems and Knowledge.....	97

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Women throughout Western history have been marginalized, and female preachers have been no exception. Forty years after the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s, some people still don't believe the word "female" or "woman" should be spoken together with the word "preacher" or "clergy." Some people, including men and women, clergy and laity, still believe that the job of the clergy is one designated only for men.

The Reverend Melissa Frazier relates a comment made to her by a member of her congregation: "I never believed a woman could be a minister until I met you" (May 2010). The Reverend Shauna Hannan also conveys a comment made to her: "For a woman, you held my attention" (May 2010). And, the Reverend Lucy Lind Hogan, professor of homiletics at Wesley Theological Seminary, states, "I definitely hit a glass ceiling. The premier preaching places would rather have a man" (May 2010).

Scholars have shown that women were among the earliest preachers in the Christian tradition, but scholars have also reported that history marginalizes female preaching. To wit, Karen King writes in "Prophetic Power and Women's Authority" that,

In every century, including our own, history records women exercising leadership in Christian communities, and in every century that leadership has been contested, beginning in the early Church and continuing through contemporary battles over the ordination and ministry of women" (21).

Mary Kim Eunjoo states in *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages*:

Although women contributed significantly to the preaching ministry of the early Church, soon thereafter they were officially excluded from the pulpit when the Christian church was institutionalized based on a patriarchal structure. Women preachers have been long regarded by the traditional patriarchal church as either heretical or unconstitutional. Consequently, church historians have excluded women preachers from their research and marginalized their preaching ministry (1).

Catherine Brekus writes in “Searching for Women in the Narratives of American Religious History” that it is still difficult to “find” women in many books and articles about American religious history (1). Brekus contends that when women’s studies programs and courses were created, many women scholars hoped these programs would help integrate women into the rest of the curriculum, but they have “often led to the segregation of women as a special, separate topic of inquiry” (3). This pattern of exclusion is repeated in American religious history textbooks which rarely include discussions of women’s religious ideas, beliefs, experiences, or leadership. Brekus argues that the challenge for women historians is to pay attention to both women’s distinctive experiences and the discourses that shaped those experiences (12).

Roxanne Mountford is the author of *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*. She reports that when she was twelve years old, her father was a choir director at a small evangelical church. The pastor of the church was male, and men held all leadership positions. Later, her family became members of a more liberal evangelical church, and Mountford still saw only men in the pulpit:

As a child, I never saw a woman preach; the only women who stepped before the pulpit gave announcements, led hymns, or told tales of missionary work in Third World countries. In the evangelical churches of my childhood, the minister stood behind the pulpit in the center of our world, tall and masculine, and the Pauline Scriptures forbidding women to preach were enforced. The first time I heard a woman preach was in 1989, when I was twenty-seven years old. When I did, I found myself noticing what a difference gender makes in the rhetorical space of the sermon (Mountford 15).

History shows us that even though male church authorities have tried to keep women out of the pulpit, women have always found places from which to preach. An increasing number of women are achieving church leadership positions. Some scholars believe that the pulpit has now become a more gender-neutral location instead of being a place where only men can preach.

According to the *1999-2000 American Theological Association Fact Book*, “The percentage of

male Master of Divinity students declined from 72.4% to 69.5% from 1995 to 1999,” but “the percentage of female Master of Divinity students increased from 27.6% to 30.5% during the same time period” (Eunjoo 3). This increase represents progress, but it still leaves women numerically under-represented in the pulpit.

However, it has only been since the 1970s that women have been ordained in any appreciable numbers; even today, some denominations ordain women but still don't freely support their admission to the priesthood. One example is the Episcopal Church: ordination is allowed and mostly accepted, but the constitution of the church does not require the ordination of women. Even today, some dioceses openly oppose the ordination of women. Some women also face resistance from congregations even if they have gained the support of colleagues or the church hierarchy. In addition, women seminarians lack a significant number of female role models when it comes to preaching. Women preachers do not want simply to copy a masculine style of preaching. Women want to find their own preaching style in the pulpit.

I first became interested in researching the discourse of female preachers several years ago. Although sermons themselves have been a subject of much research interest, most of those sermons were written by and/or preached by male preachers. Women's sermons, however, constitute a genre that has not garnered as much attention. In the present study, I expand on my interest to see if women preachers have developed their own preaching style. I began my research with female preachers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States because the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the ordinations of the first preachers who were women. The 19<sup>th</sup> century also marks a time when women had to fight just for the right to speak in public. Many women of this time, including Abby Kelly Foster and the Grimke sisters, spoke out publicly against slavery. In fact, the Grimke sisters caused such a stir that in 1837, the General Association of Massachusetts

Clergymen issued a Pastoral Letter denouncing the Grimke sisters and all public speaking and teaching by women (Zink-Sawyer 196). However, female leaders persisted. They fought societal restrictions and the men who stood in their way by speaking out in public. They recognized early on the potential of both discourse and rhetoric, and they used them at every opportunity. Some of these outspoken women felt called to preach the word of God and became itinerant evangelical preachers. Evangelical religion opened up a new world for those women who wanted more than their roles as wives, mothers, sisters and daughters (Grammer 6). Some of these preachers even left home and family because the call to preach was so strong. They faced ridicule and opposition as they struggled to find a venue for their preaching. Even women who simply invited other women into their homes where they would discuss the Bible text in private were still criticized for speaking out. Women who spoke—or tried to speak and preach in front of hostile crowds—were accused of being promiscuous or unsexed.

Nineteenth-century culture clearly dictated the appropriate place for women, and that place was not preaching in a church. Women belonged in the private sphere where they could tend to domestic duties like cooking, needlework, raising children, and cleaning. Some women, however, had a different idea of where they belonged. They found ways to preach, even if it wasn't from a pulpit in the church of a mainstream denomination.

If 19<sup>th</sup>-century women fought against cultural stereotypes to earn the right to speak in public, then shouldn't things be completely different for 21<sup>st</sup>-century women preachers? One answer to this question is, "Yes, things are different." The second answer is that things are not yet different enough. Some women preachers continue to be marginalized. Even in denominations where the ordination of women is accepted, perhaps publicly touted, women face conflicts that their male counterparts do not.



*A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes a Pulpit* relates the story of Sarah Sentilles who rearranged her life in 1998 to attend a seminary in Massachusetts and enter the ordination process. As Sentilles states, “Things did not go well. I thought it was my fault” (1). She not only withdrew from the ordination process, but she also stopped going to church. She felt that the ordination process was not designed with the success of its candidates in mind. After she dropped out of her ordination journey, she began to hear stories about other women who had not made it through the ordination process or who had miserable experiences once they were ordained and hired into the ministry of a church. They suffered abuse, humiliation, and discrimination at the hands of their senior rectors, colleagues, and even the congregations. Sentilles believes that what happened to her was “not an isolated incident but rather part of an effort to keep women out of positions of authority and to keep religion from changing” (5). Ordained ministry continues to be one of the most male-dominated of all professions. While other professions have laws that say the workplace can't discriminate based on sex, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or ability, no such law exists for churches (Sentilles 7).

If women living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were told that they were not invited into the pulpit because they were not suited for that profession, what did these women say when they did get an opportunity to preach? And, if women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still facing opposition from different areas including their own families, other women, male colleagues, congregations, and church hierarchies, what do they say when they get the opportunity to preach?

Women preachers and their words, their sermons, and their discourses are the focus of this study. The assumption made by some people might be that women preachers—those of 150 years ago and of today—use their sermons as a place to speak out about the struggles they faced in their quest to become a preacher. A second assumption might be that women preachers

somehow preach just like men, but perhaps with softer volume. The data collected from analyzing ten sermons written by six women preachers reveals the preaching style of the six women preachers in this study. The six women preachers in this study preach not like women preachers, but like the preachers they are.

I include sermons written by 19<sup>th</sup>-century preachers Lucretia Mott and the Reverend Anna Howard Shaw. Lucretia Mott was a Quaker, and while that sect didn't ordain either men or women, they believed in the spiritual equality of men and women; therefore, both could preach. Mott was a staunch supporter of equality and justice, and "her contemporaries, admirers and adversaries alike, confirmed that Mott's defense of an issue brought it respect and credibility" (Greene 1). Mott seemed like a good candidate for my study because she had experience speaking out against injustice and speaking in public. The Reverend Anna Howard Shaw was the first woman ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church, and she also earned her medical degree. In addition, Shaw was active in the Woman's Rights Movement. I chose to include Shaw because she was one of the few women ordained in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Manuscript sermons written by 19<sup>th</sup> century women preachers are limited in number, so I chose to include only two sermons from this time period.

I also include the sermons of 21<sup>st</sup>-century preachers the Reverend Melissa Frazier, Minister to Children and Families at the Memorial Baptist Church in Greenville, North Carolina; the Reverend Dr. Lucy Lind Hogan, an Episcopal priest and professor of preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.; the Reverend Shauna Hannan, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina; and the Reverend Dr. Wanda Neely, pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Kinston, North Carolina. These four contemporary women preachers represent four Christian denominations: Baptist,

Lutheran, Episcopal, and Presbyterian. I felt it important to this study to include sermons written by women from a variety of denominations. I chose to include two sermons from each of these contemporary preachers. In choosing sermons to include in this study, I looked at the length of each sermon, the organization of the sermon, and the Bible text (s) that the sermon was based on. I chose sermons of varying lengths, sermons that had a clear beginning, middle and end, and sermons that were based on different Bible texts. The ten sermons analyzed in this study provide me with a reasonable sample of sermons.

### **Looking Back: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

To fully understand why the sermons of women preachers are worth examining, it is important to remember how women were categorized in the 1800s. The women who won the right to speak in public and then to preach in public set the stage for those women who would come after them, desiring the same rights. It is important to acknowledge the history and accomplishments of the early American women preachers if contemporary women preachers are going to have a clear understanding of their legacy. What style of preaching did women preachers living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century choose to use? Is there significance to women having their own preaching styles? The answers to these questions are still under construction. Nineteenth-century women preachers and 21<sup>st</sup>-century women preachers share the struggle to succeed in a traditionally male-oriented and male-dominated profession. These women preachers have made the decision that their call to preach was and is stronger than the opposition they face. These leaders have decided to develop and to use their preaching styles.

Many of the women who preached in the United States were evangelists or itinerant preachers who often called themselves “exhorters” because of the prejudices against women

preaching (Mountford 12; Brekus 48). An exhorter was an informal evangelist who “publicly admonished or encouraged others to repent. Unlike ordained clergymen, exhorters had no institutional authority: [sic.] they did not have the right to deliver formal sermons explaining biblical texts, and they usually spoke from the pew rather than the pulpit” (Brekus 48). The pulpit was reserved for male preachers.

Most women preached without a license and very few of them were ordained. Most of these women found the courage to speak in public only because they were preaching. Itinerant preachers delivered sermons at revivals, tent meetings, and other gatherings - places other than in pulpits of mainstream denominations. These women felt that they had been called, “often against their wills, often by way of wild visions, to leave their homes, their husbands, their families and friends, to wander the earth preaching the gospel” (Grammer 4).

Unfortunately, many of these women have been forgotten. Their names are nowhere to be found, and any texts of their sermons have been lost or destroyed. Fortunately, some of these women evangelicals wrote articles, letters, or memoirs to leave a trace of themselves behind. For others, male clergymen made notes about them in their own memoirs or letters, thereby leaving information for historians.

Between 1740 and 1845, the female preachers failed to create a lasting, coherent tradition of female evangelism. These women had to continue to re-invent themselves as “laborers in the harvest” (Brekus 15). Women preachers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century didn’t know about their 18<sup>th</sup>-century predecessors, and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century women preachers never mentioned the names of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century evangelicals. “Cut off from their collective past, women struggled to defend their right to preach without ever realizing that others had fought the same battle before them...Female

preaching has not been a continuous tradition in American history, but a disconnected and broken one” (Brekus 16).

Echoing these thoughts is Michael Casey. He argues that when women like Harriet Livermore and Maria Stewart and other nineteenth century speakers emerged, they were actually stepping into an almost two-hundred-year-old tradition of female oratory (Casey 2). Even though Anne Hutchinson was probably the first female public speaker in America, her efforts went largely unknown to women who lived after her. One reason is that none of the sermon texts from Hutchinson’s time in Rhode Island (1600s) survived, and the only surviving text of her testimony at her heresy trial has been corrupted (Casey 7).

Mary Farrell Bednarowski supports the contentions of both Casey and Brekus. She states, “It is nearly impossible to summon the names of individual women who have achieved fame within the context of American religious history. The experiences and contributions of women have gone largely unrecorded in the standard American religious histories” (208). The women whose names are familiar were probably associated with one of the non-traditional, marginal movements that were founded in the nineteenth century.

In the Introduction of the book *And Blessed Is She: Sermons by Women*, editor Dr. David Farmer admits that finding the sermons of women preachers from the past is challenging because much of their work has not been preserved (Farmer vi) Farmer states:

In the history of preaching in America, the trend has been for women who felt a call from God, or who desired to preach for any other reason, to find their way out of mainstream churches and into a sect where they were not viewed as “radical”; where their preaching gifts were not merely tolerated, but enthusiastically recognized; and where there was little or no “tradition” to restrict their religious expression in any way. This surely has been the path of least resistance. Those women who insisted on ministerial rights and credentials within the mainstream have had a much more difficult time of it, and their story is still being told (3).

It wasn't easy to stand up for women's rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Not only were women facing cultural restrictions, they were also fighting Bible scripture which seemed to relegate women to the private sphere. For centuries, the words of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians and the words of Timothy seemed to endorse the exclusion of women from the pulpit and from leadership positions in the church<sup>1</sup>. But women argued against these interpretations. They wrote books, they wrote papers, they spoke out publicly against these widely held beliefs, and they had some success. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Antoinette Brown Blackwell became the first woman to be ordained in the United States. However, even after Blackwell broke the ordination barrier, women did not gain equal rights in the church.

### **Views on Women Preachers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

In 1897, *The Ministry to the Congregation: Lectures on Homiletics* was published. It was written by John A. Kern, D.D. and Professor of Practical Theology at Vanderbilt University, and is comprised of lectures which represent the homiletic instruction presented during the previous ten years in the Biblical Department of Randolph-Macon College. All of the lectures and information presented are aimed at *men* and preaching, as evidenced by the use of the masculine pronoun when referring to the preacher. In the introductory comments, Dr. Kern talks about the personal aim of the Christian preacher, stating, "And no speaker is under necessity of declaring the life that is in him so completely as the Christian preacher. He must speak as a good man out of the good treasure of his heart, and may keep back nothing" (1). Kern also believes that, "Homiletics, then, is more than the theory and art of sermon making. It does not begin even with the preacher as such, but with the man himself...So, what manner of men we are, even in our

secret soul, will appear in our preaching” (Kern 2). Clearly, he sees preaching as designed for men.

Conversely, the Reverend B.T. Roberts, founder of the Free Methodist Church, published a book in 1891 titled *Ordaining Women*. He supports the idea of women ministers and states that he wrote his book from a strong conviction of duty. He wants the issue of ordaining women to be considered “calmly and candidly” and not with apprehension that ordaining women will have dire consequences. He assures his reader that the Friends (Quakers) have allowed women to be equal to men for over two hundred years, and “yet, she has lost none of her womanliness in consequence” (Roberts 6). Roberts contends that the idea that women should not have equal rights is deeply rooted because the “law of force has been the prevailing law. The stronger have tyrannized over the weaker” (10).

Roberts details women’s lack of legal rights in the 19th century. He also argues that women have prophesied and cites the examples of Miriam and Deborah (52). Roberts states, “Then we conclude that there is nothing in the creation of woman or in her condition under the law which proves that no woman should be ordained as a minister of the Gospel” (53).

Twentieth-century scholar Lisa Boyd explores the issue of women preaching in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. In 1876, the Presbyterian Church engaged in an ecclesiastical trial over whether women should be allowed to preach. As Boyd explains, the pastor of a Presbyterian Church in New Jersey, Elijah R. Craven, charged a fellow minister, Isaac M. See “with disobedience to Holy Scripture because See had allowed two women to ‘preach and teach’ from the pulpit of Wickliffe Presbyterian Church at the Sunday morning and evening services” (Boyd 281). The charge was sustained by the Presbytery of Newark, and both the Synod of New Jersey and the General Assembly, on appeal, upheld the action taken by the Presbytery (Boyd

281). “This decision reiterated the denomination’s belief that Scripture prohibited women from speaking in the church” (Boyd 281).

The Cumberland Presbyterians ordained their first woman in 1889: Louisa M. Woosley (Farmer 11). Woosley was one of the earliest women preachers in the Presbyterian tradition in the United States. In 1891, she wrote *Shall Women Preach? or, the Question Answered by Louisa M. Woosley* in which she answers an array of objections to preaching by women. She addresses the words in Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians, refuting a literal interpretation of his words against women speaking in church. She argues that Paul’s words in verse 34 have no reference to religious worship because if they did, “then a woman must sit in church as mute as a dummy. If she even sings she breaks the silence, and thereby becomes disobedient” (Woosley 17). Likewise, she addresses the objection many have that there are no examples in the Bible of women being ordained. She counters by contending that there is no evidence showing when and by whom Luke, Mark, Apollos, Titus, and Aquila were ordained (Woosley 29).

Phoebe Palmer, founder of the Holiness tradition, challenged the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea that women did not belong in the public sphere. Palmer believes that prophesying and witnessing were essential to the process of holiness. They were also a sign that someone had been sanctified (Hogan 218). Palmer argues that by rejecting women, the church was also rejecting God (Hogan 219). “The holiness groups played an important part in the development of opportunities for preaching among women. Holiness groups broke away from mainstream Methodist churches. They believed they were reviving the original teaching of John Wesley and especially stressed sanctification” (Farmer 9). The Reverend Lucy Hogan believes that Phoebe Palmer’s persuasive discourse has been forgotten even in the “holiness churches that trace their origins to her theological insights” (212).



## Women Preaching Today

The assumption might be made that the struggles of earlier feminists such as Abby Kelley Foster and preachers such as Antoinette Brown Blackwell paid off for contemporary female preachers who have chosen to enter the male dominated occupation of preaching. For many women preachers, that might be the case. For many others, however, they continue the struggle begun by their preaching sisters.

Women today outnumber men in some seminaries. Carol Miles notes that in 2002, more women than ever before were enrolling in seminaries; at mainline Protestant Theological schools, as many as 50% of the Masters of Divinity students were female (Miles 3). In some preaching classes, women occupy more seats than do men. Women are finding more opportunities in church leadership positions as well, although the higher up we look in church hierarchy, the fewer women will be found. Even in churches where women have been called, they can face opposition from male colleagues and bosses. Some women find their biggest opposition comes from “women, ordained and not ordained, congregation members and colleagues” (Sentilles 56).

Betty Bone Schiess, a female Episcopal priest, would agree. In her book *Why Me, Lord? One woman's ordination to the priesthood with commentary and complaint*, she states that twenty nine years after her own 1974 ordination, problems in church and society are still with us (Schiess ix). Schiess and ten other women were “unofficially” ordained not by their diocesan bishops who refused the opportunity, but by retired seminary bishops. At the time, there was no prohibition in Canon Law restricting women's ordination, but there was no provision endorsing women's ordination either. Schiess actually sued the Episcopal Church because the church would not ordain women (Schiess 100). In 1968, the church voted to allow licensed lay readers to

administer the chalice. Scheiss saw this as clearly discriminatory because according to Canon 50, only males could be licensed lay readers. She brought this issue to the attention of her NOW (National Organization of Women) chapter, and they took up the fight to have this discriminatory practice eliminated.

Scheiss's efforts might be seen as reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women's opposition to the discriminatory practice of keeping women out of public life and out of the pulpit. In 1976, at the General Convention in Minneapolis, the Episcopal Church voted to add to the Canons permission for women to be ordained and Scheiss dropped her lawsuit. Scheiss still "feels dismayed at the fecklessness of the Episcopal Church—its hierarchy so fixed, its polity so cumbersome, its ways of worshiping so pretentious, its misunderstanding of gender and sexuality so total, and its unwillingness to admit its wrongdoing so obvious" (140).

The number of women ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the United States has soared in the last twenty five years. There were 350 active women ministers in 1977, but in 2002 that number had increased to 3,766 (Miles 3). However, numbers can be misleading. Not all women who attend seminary end up employed or even looking for employment. Of the number of active female ministers, approximately half were serving outside of parish ministry as chaplains, pastoral counselors, and presbytery executives (Miles 8). Additionally, the "greatest number of women serve in churches with 51-100 members...the larger the congregation, the less likely they are to have a woman as head of the staff" (Miles 9).

In some cases, women fill the congregation, sing in the choir, organize the bake sales, and teach Sunday school, but men occupy leadership positions and the pulpit. The result can be that most people assume that women have little importance in the church because their role is less visible. However, women have broken the rules set for them by society from the earliest

days of American Protestantism (Braude 31). As of 2008, about half of all American religious groups ordained women, but the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention still do not ordain women. Because of the shortage of male priests in the Catholic Church, about half of the 19,000 Catholic Churches in the United States have women serving as non-ordained, paid parish ministers (Braude 105).

The Reformed minister Susan Durber relates the story of how her church was being remodeled. There were some drawings produced to show how the new pulpit would look, and the artist drew the preacher behind the pulpit as a man (Durber 168). It seems that even in a church with a female minister, “the ideal preacher, the generic preacher, the sample preacher is a man” (Durber168). Durber states that the pulpit is a place where the discourses of Christianity are being formed and reformed, “where our local Christian communities hear and speak their theology. Women need to be part of this if the church is to be made new” (171). She believes that it is time for women to preach like women, to “enter this once traditionally macho space and redefine it, just as our sense of what it means to be a woman is diverse, flowing and outgoing” (Durber 171).

One religious argument used against women preaching is that all twelve disciples were men. In a sermon preached on August 9, 1992 at First Baptist Church in Hampton, Virginia, William Booth argues that if we adhere to this rule, then we also need to enforce the rule that all preachers must be Jewish because the twelve disciples were Jewish. “Maleness and Jewishness were the stamp on the men Christ first chose. To argue that one can set aside the Jewishness of the Twelve while holding on to the maleness of the Twelve is to be blatantly hypocritical” (Booth 110). Booth also makes the point that those who refer to the scripture verses in 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 to prohibit women from speaking in the church must also “slam the door in the faces of

men who would dare pray without holding up holy hands, and in the faces of women who would braid their hair, wear jewelry, or expensive clothes, if they would not be labeled hypocrites” (111). He contends that, for him, the central text that opens the door for women preachers is found in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome. Paul writes that preaching becomes possible because someone is sent, and he doesn’t clarify or limit who can be sent. Therefore, Paul leaves the door “wide open for anyone, male or female, young or old, servant or otherwise to preach if he or she is sent” (Booth 112).

Booth talks about his own experience of hiring a female associate in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. His experience proved to him that the black Baptists have been excluding women from the pulpit for too long. He recounts his associate’s circuitous, long, hard journey to become an ordained minister, and he said that she is now a Methodist minister because most Baptists shut the doors to women preachers.

*Saved from Silence. Finding Women’s Voice in Preaching* focuses on the concept of women’s voice. This book examines the preaching voice of women as the authors explore the lives of women in the early church, Middle Ages, and nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

It would be easy to be deceived into believing that that the struggles of the women of the past were not now our own. We could believe that the demons have been slain, the obstacles overcome, the future opened wide for women in the church. Sadly, it is not so... What happens when the woman who has learned not to value her own thoughts, emotions, and experiences is called to preach? Where does the teaching of preaching begin? How does she learn to value what she has to say? How can women move into the world of preaching to bring the prophetic word? How are they themselves the prophetic word? How can they be “saved from silence?” The implications of this theology of voice for preaching and the teaching of it are immense and brimming with promise (Hudson & Turner 3).

Carol Noren agrees that both clergy and laity can benefit from an examination of what happens when the voice proclaiming the Word is feminine (9). In 1972, women constituted 10% of the student body in Protestant seminaries in the United States. In 1986, that number was 26%.

Many of these women were the first female pastors their congregations ever had. That would make a difference to them and to their churches. Women today have a degree of uncertainty or tension concerning women preacher's relationship to the church. Nearly all women express awareness that they would be perceived as different by clergy and laity. This difference is often perceived as an obstacle to be negotiated (Noren 24). In *The Woman in the Pulpit*, Carol Noren states that women today defend their call based on a contemporary sense of fairness: women ought to have the same professional opportunities as men. They ask, "Does gender matter as long as the job gets done?" Women are transforming the way people think about women and the church (Noren 24). Noren also contends that the absence of female role models for women in the ministry can be a problem, but it leaves women freer to develop their own gifts and styles. They don't have to imitate famous women preachers (Noren 31). Noren contends that a goal for women (and men) in the pulpit is "to be intentional rather than accidental about congruity between verbal and nonverbal communication. Physical presence and words spoken should focus listener attention on the gospel being proclaimed, rather than heightening awareness of the one proclaiming it" (86).

Roxanne Mountford examines how "women have found spaces from which to preach throughout history," despite the efforts of male church authorities to suppress them (11). The world of preaching she knew as a child was a masculine world of rhetorical performance. The thought of a woman in her church and in her pulpit never crossed her mind. Mountford contends, "American Protestant spaces—architecture, pulpits, and church communities—anticipate and reinforce this masculine tradition" (3). These "preaching spaces" were designed for male bodies which leave contemporary women preachers searching for ways to accommodate themselves to the physicality of preaching. Mountford wonders what options there are for women preachers

who see the pulpit as a space not built for them, and concludes that one option is simply not to use the pulpit (39).

Mountford observed three women preachers, two of whom elected to leave the pulpit when they preached. These women chose to preach from the floor. This move allowed them to claim a space in the church that was just their own. They were no longer captives of the masculine-defined space of the pulpit. The Reverend Neely, whose sermons were examined for this study, no longer uses a pulpit because she finds it to be an obstacle. Pulpits were built for a man's frame, and many women preachers have to use a stool or a step to even be seen by the congregation.

Paul Sullins' article, "The Stained Glass Ceiling: Career Attainment for Women Clergy" highlights his study of women clergy after 20 years of ordination:

Contrary to my initial expectations, this study found resistance to the ministry of women to be undiminished over the past twenty years both in the aggregate and in its effect on individual careers. Also contrary to expectations, this unchanging resistance was found to be located entirely in congregations, and not at all in the decisions of the church hierarchy or other clergy. On both counts it appears that male/female inequality among the clergy is not due to formal institutional discrimination but is a result of embedded cultural values, values that are particularly resident in congregations and that show no indication of changing (Sullins 261).

His study did not demonstrate that women clergy are now being assimilated into denominational life (Sullins 261). Sullins' study focused on the Episcopal Church, but he argues that the results are also true of the Presbyterian Church.

Even when women make huge progress as ordained clergy, some men in the ministry still refuse to acknowledge that progress. For example, Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori was elected as presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States in 2006. She is the first woman to hold that office. Reacting to her appointment, the rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Illinois told the *New York Times* that the new bishop would not be welcome in his diocese

(Sentilles 119). Today, there are three dioceses in the American Episcopal Church that still refuse to ordain women.

### **Rationale for This Study**

The struggle of women preachers to be ordained, to receive a call from a church, to be taken seriously, or even to be seen as equal to men is not the primary focus of this paper. However, it is important to recognize those struggles and to wonder where they might be reflected in the lives and work of women preachers. One might hypothesize that women preachers would use their time in the pulpit to talk about their own struggle to be in that place. After all, we have only to look at the speech text of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. to see the struggle of black Americans reflected in the words he wrote and delivered in 1963. Furthermore, politicians sometimes use their speeches to define the struggles of their party and their plans for what they will achieve when elected. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to expect that women preachers might use their time in the spotlight to foreground their own fight against tradition and to talk about how much better the church will be now that they are in the pulpit. In order to test this hypothesis, this dissertation examines the sermons of six women preachers from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These sermons are the narratives of women preachers, and these narratives might reflect the struggles particular to the women who preached them.

The narrative dimension of sermons has been studied before. As Eugene Lowery suggests, “We begin by regarding the sermon as a homiletical plot, a narrative art form, a sacred story” (xxi). While this is one form a sermon can take, not all sermons have to be formatted or preached as narratives. In fact, some sermons don’t seem to have much structure at all. Seminaries teach the skill of preaching, but not every minister excels at preaching. In addition,

the preacher can choose to stick with a learned formula or to add his/her own dimensions, and, of course, each preacher will have his or her own personal style.

Thomas Long is an ordained priest and author of *The Witness of Preaching*, a text used in preaching classes. He is also the Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He suggests that the crucial elements of preaching include the congregation, the preacher, the sermon, and the presence of Christ (Long 16). Long believes that when preachers deliver sermons, there is a larger framework of ministerial self-understanding. The preacher has an image of the preacher's role (18). Three of these images include the herald, the pastor, and the storyteller/poet. "At some point these three images share values about the Ministry of preaching, but at other places they are rivals, embodying quite different and competing views of who a preacher is and what a preacher should do" (Long 19). The Herald image refers to a high theological view of preaching, emphasizing a strong connection between preaching and the direct address of God. While the preacher speaks the words of the sermon, God actually does the proclaiming (Long 19). "Herald preachers do not strive to create more beautiful and more excellent sermons but seek to be more responsive and obedient to the message they receive in Scripture They do not aspire to be poets; they aspire to be mouthpieces of God, servants of the word" (Long 20).

The second image is the Pastor. The Pastor focuses on the listener, and on the impact of the sermon on the hearer (Long 28). "Pastoral preachers see sermons as healing words addressed to concrete situation of human need. Therefore, when pastoral preachers turn to the Scripture, they tend to focus on those aspects of texts that involve personal issues and healing possibilities" (Long 31).



The third image is that of a storyteller or poet. “This image differs from the previous two in that it tells us *who* the preacher is by describing the *literary and artistic* character of the preacher's sermons: preaching marked by storytelling and poetically expressive language” (Long 37). Throughout the history of the church, storytelling has emerged as an important part of homiletics, but the 1970s brought emerging theories of narrative, so storytelling gained new prominence. Long contends that the Bible itself can be described as a story. Even the non-narrative parts of the Bible—epistles, proverbs, poems, doctrinal argumentation—only make sense within the overarching biblical story they are framed by (39). Continues Long, “For the storyteller/poet, then, narrative is not merely *one* way to proclaim the gospel, it is the *normative* way” (43).

Paul Scott Wilson, Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College of the Toronto School of Theology, proposes a four page approach to preaching. The four “pages” refer to distinct moments of preaching rather than a sermon with only four pages. Wilson believes that this approach addresses many of the challenges preachers face today as they compose God-centered sermons. He contends that for the beginning preacher, the four pages can offer a solid methodology, and it can be added to the experience of experienced preachers (Wilson 25). Wilson states, “Still, we ought to be cautious in considering sermon structure: genuine good news comes only from God. If the Holy Spirit does not choose to use our words, there is nothing we can do to make them into good news. We cannot fix lack of good news in a sermon by mere devices we might conceive” (25). Wilson argues that with his method, preachers will make efficient and effective use of time and will not have to wonder which item goes where in their sermon (27).

Barbara Brown Taylor is an Episcopal priest who holds the Harry R. Bauman Chair in Religion and Philosophy at Piedmont College, and she serves as an adjunct professor of Christian spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. In 1995, Baylor University recognized Taylor as one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English language. Taylor writes that she doesn't know ahead of time what she will preach. If she knew, then her sermons would become expositions of things she already knows and thinks her congregation should know too (Taylor 86). She states,

I do not want to scatter pearls of wisdom from the pulpit; I want to discover something fresh - even if I cannot quite identify it yet, even if it is still covered with twigs and mud. I want to haul it into the pulpit and show others what God has shown me, while I am still shaking with excitement and delight (Taylor 86).

She approaches the text as though God is in it, believing that she must find its original meaning before bringing her own interpretation to the text (Taylor 86). Once she discovers what the text means, she stops working and allows the text to have a gestation period. During this time, she is waiting for the "stirring of the Holy Spirit...I scan the text one more time and all of a sudden there is an egg in plain view, something where there had been nothing just a moment before, and the sermon is born" (Taylor 87).

## **This Study**

This dissertation is a case study that analyzes ten sermons of six women preachers. I analyze one sermon each from the Reverend Anna Howard Shaw and Lucretia Mott, who preached in the 19th century. I also analyze two sermons each from 21<sup>st</sup> century women preachers: the Reverend Melissa Frazier, the Reverend Lucy Lind Hogan, the Reverend Shauna Hannan, and the Reverend Wanda Neely. These choices will obviously limit the conclusions I reach. The data demonstrates particular things about particular sermons written by particular

women, and the results from this study are not wholly generalizable to the entire population of women preachers.

In choosing the sermons from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, my search was narrowed by the dearth of written sermons. As Catherine Brekus notes, some scholars and historians have neglected to include women in any significant way in American religious history (1). In addition, many women who preached did not write their sermons down, and many written texts were destroyed or lost. As author David Albert Farmer states in the preface to the book *And Blessed is She*.

*Sermons by Women,*

[u]nfortunately, the work by women preachers in the past has gone largely unnoticed and, thus, unpreserved. This combined with the fact that there have not been nearly so many women preaching as there have been men makes it difficult to find appropriate sermons. None of the primary historians of preaching known to me, for example, have recalled a single contribution by a woman (vi).

In searching for sermons written by women who preached in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I found one written by the Reverend Anna Howard Shaw who was the first woman ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church in 1880. Interestingly, Shaw was also trained in medicine, and she earned her M.D. at Boston University. The Reverend Shaw fought hard to be ordained, and she became the pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church in East Dennis on Cape Cod where she served for seven years (Farmer & Hunter 20). She was denied ordination by the New England Methodist Episcopal Conference, but was later granted permission to be ordained at the Methodist Protestant Church's General Conference in 1880 (Farmer & Hunter 21). Shaw later left parish ministry to work for women's suffrage.

In addition to the sermon by Shaw, I chose one sermon written by Lucretia Mott. While she was never ordained, Mott fought for women's suffrage and she preached against all forms of oppression and injustice (Greene 3). Mott saw the state of religion during her lifetime as

deplorable. “It was characterized by sectarianism and dogmatism, emphasized priestcraft, theology, ritual, and ceremony, condoned injustice and inequality” (Greene 14). Mott saw priestcraft as the greatest obstacle in changing the female condition. She made her goal the “exposing of the untruth of its claims by contesting its authority on the basis of the authority of truth itself” (Greene 17). Mott has been designated as the leader of the movement to bring about equality for women in the pulpit. During the Seneca Falls Woman’s Rights meeting in 1848, Lucretia Mott took the lead in drafting The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments which included this proposition: “That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit” (Farmer & Hunter 9).

Even though there are more women preachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I was unsure how willing women preachers would be to participate in my study and to provide sermons for me to analyze. I began by contacting the Reverend Melissa Frazier in my hometown of Greenville, North Carolina. I had used a sermon provided by Frazier in a paper written for a doctoral class. She enthusiastically responded to my request and sent sermons for me to use in my study. The Reverend Frazier graduated from George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University. She sent out resumes in Texas, and she received thirty rejection letters. She eventually received a call from Immanuel Baptist Church in Greenville, North Carolina. She said in an interview that it would still be hard to find a job preaching at a church in Texas. As she says, “I know I’ll never preach there in a church. They are twenty years behind. People coming out of seminary there...work for non-profits, go overseas, but not in churches” (Frazier: May 2010). Frazier says that her undergraduate professors were very supportive, but her classmates were not. In graduate school, everyone was supportive. Her family and friends were supportive. “My grandfather is a

minister. He is the reason I became a minister. At age 12, I wondered, “Why aren’t women in the pulpit?” (Frazier: May 2010).

It was important for my study to use sermons by women preachers who represented different denominations, so I contacted the Reverend Shauna Hannan who graciously accepted my offer and sent sermons for me to use in my study. Hannan currently does not have a call, so she preaches infrequently. In fact, in the last eight years, she has only done one-time event preaching. As she says, “I do miss preaching” (Hannan: May 18, 2010). She is currently an Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. When asked about the obstacles she has had to overcome as a woman preacher, Hannan replied, “That is not exactly the lens through which I see things: that I am female and others are male I tend to like to have a view that’s different than others” (Hannan: May 18, 2010). While Hannan is aware that there are places in the United States where women find it harder to receive a call to preach, she chooses to focus on her job of teaching and preaching and not on the fact that she is a female in a traditionally male-dominated profession.

I also contacted the Presbyterian Campus Ministry in town and got the name of the Reverend Wanda Neely, former pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Greenville, North Carolina. I spoke with Neely in person on May 25, 2010. She had recently “fired” herself from her position as co-pastor at First Presbyterian because she felt that the church could not afford her salary and the programs she had helped start, so she was working temporarily as a resident chaplain at the hospital. Just recently, Neely received a call to the First Presbyterian Church in Kinston, North Carolina. Neely has been ordained for twenty-five years. For at least half of those years her role was to introduce the concept of having a woman in the pulpit (Neely: May 25, 2010). Neely earned the dual degrees of Masters of Divinity and Masters of Religious Education

from Southeastern Baptist Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. She received her Doctor of Ministry at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. During her education, Neely states that her Hebrew professor loved to intimidate her. “I was the only married Master of Divinity student in my program. It was assumed that the others (women) were looking for husbands” (Neely: May 2010). Neely was one of five women in seminary, and one of the biggest problems for her was the lack of role models for female preachers. She had to draw on her public speaking experience in college in preparation for preaching. Neely does not use a pulpit because they were always too large for her frame. She used to carry a “set-up” so that she could see the congregation and they could see her. Now, she finds that the pulpit gets in her way so she doesn’t use it (Neely: May 2010). As for sermon style, Neely loves the narratives from the scripture. “I keep coming back to preferred styles - mine is narrative, storytelling” (Neely 2010).

Finally, I contacted The Reverend Lucy Lind Hogan, an Episcopal priest who teaches preaching at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. I read her book *Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching*, and thought she would make a valuable addition to my study because of her experience as a preacher and as a professor of homiletics. She graciously agreed to participate in my study and sent sermons for use in my study. Hogan graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary with a Masters of Divinity. She was ordained as a priest in 1982 and moved to San Diego shortly thereafter for her husband’s job. San Diego was very conservative and did not welcome her. They later moved back to D.C., and she got a part-time job at a church in Washington. Hogan received her Doctor of Ministry in 1987. When she graduated from seminary, very few women had been ordained. “It was laughable to think of being a solo rector” (Hogan: May 4, 2010). She explains that the Methodists just did a big study of the placement of women preachers. The study found that women do get placed, but not at large churches. She

adds that the majority of Christian churches do not ordain women (Hogan: May 4, 2010). Hogan believes that the biggest obstacle facing women preachers today is still the culture-the idea that being a priest is what men do. There are also the biblical injunctions that women shall keep silent in church (Hogan: May 4, 2010).

Because I chose to focus on the sermon texts and not the actual delivery of the sermons, I interviewed each woman either in person or over the telephone so that I could get an idea of her vocal characteristics. I also listened to the Reverend Neely's sermons on a CD which she provided for me. I accessed [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org) and listened to a sermon by the Reverend Hannan, and I listened to a recorded sermon that the Reverend Hogan had delivered at Washington National Cathedral. When analyzing the sermon texts, I could remember the nuances and inflections the women used from the recorded sermons. The Reverend Frazier preaches only infrequently, so her sermons were not available for me to hear. In a future study, I would like to add the component of watching women preachers deliver their sermons to observe their appearance and body language as well as listening to their vocal delivery.

For this study, I use narrative analysis to examine these sermons because I see these sermons as the preachers' discourse or reflections of their experiences. Their sermon discourse is well worth examining to see if it is shaped by the experience of being a woman preacher. Do women use rhetorical devices in their sermons to adapt to working in a traditionally male-dominated profession? Do they preach like women? To answer those questions, I utilize the narrative structure of William Labov and the theory of discourse analysis suggested by James Paul Gee. Because both of these analyses are extensive and detailed, I chose sermons of moderate length. The sermon by the Reverend Shaw was typeset and included in a book, and it was nine pages long. The sermon by Lucretia Mott was also typeset and published in a book, and

it was ten pages in length. The sermons from the contemporary women preachers ranged in length from three pages to fourteen pages. The documents that I use are original sermons from the 21<sup>st</sup>-century female preachers, and re-printed versions of sermons from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century female preachers. I include copies of all sermons used in Appendix A of my dissertation.

I first read through each sermon many times, making notes about the central message of each sermon. Next, I began with the narrative structure of Labov and Waletzky. I read each sermon again, applying the structural elements of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. I noted which elements were found in each sermon, and I also noted how each of the components functioned in each sermon. As previously determined, while narrative is one method of developing a sermon, not all sermons are written as narratives.

Women's sermons have not been as widely studied as men's; therefore, this study allows me to see if these sermons can be classified as containing the narrative structure developed by Labov and Waletzky. I examine women's sermon discourses as narratives because sermons seem to be the stories that women tell when they get into the pulpit.

Studies show that some preachers who are women believe in using storytelling as a frame for their sermons (Lawless 21). They feel that they can relate their personal experiences to the congregation and to the Scripture. They believe it allows the congregation to relate to them and allows them to relate to the congregation. The Reverend Hogan believes that most preachers know they are called to examine and interpret the Scripture. "Interpretation involves another dance, a dance involving the text, and the reader or readers of the text. Hermeneutics challenges us to think about what it means to be an interpreter of a text" (Hogan 97).

Next, I took the twenty-six questions that Gee suggests using for discourse analysis. I went through each sermon, reading it again and answering each of the questions in detail. I was



surprised at how much material each of these analyses produced. I draw from Gee's method of Discourse Analysis to look for patterns and meanings within and across these texts. My analysis will uncover any rhetorical strategies such as storytelling, inclusive language, female imagery or any other adaptations in the sermons.

## **Conclusion**

Research evidences the resistance that women preachers still face to their being in the pulpit. Women preachers are, in a sense, proving themselves through their work and through their sermons. If we are still looking for women in the written histories of American religion as Dr. Brekus contends, then analyzing the sermons of women preachers might help focus interest in studying the lives of women preachers and the work that they do. This study offers insight into how these women preachers construct their sermons and how these women preachers use their sermon language to create their own discourse. It helps to answer the question, "Have the six women preachers in this study developed distinct and discernible preaching styles?"

## CHAPTER 2: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: THE DATA

### **Introduction**

Sharan Merriam, writing about qualitative research methodologies, explains that narrative analysis uses people's stories to understand experience; therefore, the stories become the data. Studies show that there is no one best way to analyze the stories we elicit and collect, so that opens up possibilities for utilizing a variety of analytic strategies (Merriam 203). Although we can use various methodological approaches to analyze stories, all of them have in common that they examine how the story is constructed, what linguistic tools are used, and how the cultural context of the story is relevant, both to the structure of the story and to its interpretation. "First person accounts of experience constitute the narrative 'text' of this research approach" (Merriam 202). Merriam notes that whether the account is in "the form of autobiography, life history, interview, journal, letters, or other materials that we collect, the text is analyzed for the meaning it has for the author" (202). A linguistic approach is one way of doing narrative analysis, and it is in linguistic approaches to narratives that the present study is grounded.

### **Linguistic Approaches to Narrative Analysis**

Michael Toolan, a leading scholar of discourse analysis, writes that a tale involves a tale and a teller, so a narrative must also include both a tale and a teller. Toolan points out that this same observation could be made of every speech event: "What makes narratives different, especially literary or extended spoken ones, is that the teller is often particularly noticeable" (Toolan 1). The audience looks at the narrator or listens to the narrator, but does not typically interact with him or her (Toolan 3). Toolan defines a narrative as "a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events" and posits that narratives include the following six characteristics:

1. a degree of artificial fabrication or constructedness that we don't usually find in spontaneous conversation;
2. a degree of prefabrication—narratives contain bits that we have seen or heard before;
3. a trajectory—narratives go somewhere and are expected to go somewhere with development and a resolution or conclusion provided;
4. a teller who is always important;
5. displacement, which is the ability of human language to refer to things or events that are removed in space or time from the speaker or the addressee; and
6. recollection, or happenings that are spatially and temporally remote from the teller and his or her audience (5).

According to Jaworski and Coupland, co-editors of *The Discourse Reader*, narratives are intimately tied to the narrator's point of view. The narrator's subjectivity is present in what he or she finds "tellable." The meaning of the narrative is jointly constructed by the selectivity filtering actions of both speaker and listener (32). In keeping with that sense of fluidity, David Rudrum, professor of English at the University of Huddersfield, does not believe that a narrative needs to fit into a narrow definition:

If one is going to try to formulate a definition of narrative, one would do better to focus on use rather than representation...My emphasis is on the question of use...It is better understood as a call for methodological re-orientation of the way we go about conceiving narrative, and hence narratology. The fact is that there is an almost infinite variety of narratives and narrative forms. Narratives are found in a boundless number of genres ( 201).

Rudrum's research interests include the various forms and theories of narrative; his Ph.D. study was titled, "Wittgenstein and the Theory of Narrative." Rudrum believes that it isn't necessary to define a narrative to study it. Most scholars know a narrative when they see it, but

every definition can be subject to exceptions. If a text doesn't fit into one precise definition, does that mean it can't be classified as a narrative? Not from Rudrum's perspective.

Barbara Johnstone, a highly respected linguist and discourse analyst, also provides insight into narrative:

Narrative has been one of the major themes in humanistic and social scientific thought since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. The essence of humanness, long characterized as the tendency to make sense of the world through rationality, has come increasingly to be described as the tendency to tell stories, to make sense of the world through narrative (635).

Johnstone's idea is that humans use stories to make sense of the world around them. The preachers in this study use their sermon narratives to make sense of the Bible text and to make the Bible text make sense to their congregations.

Patrick Hogan, an English professor at the University of Connecticut, looks at both structure and purpose of narratives, or the componential and functional analysis. Says Hogan, "Componential analysis seeks to isolate the elements and operations that make up narrative. Functional analysis explores the purpose of narratives" (66). Hogan explains that componential analysis identifies the different elements that make up a narrative and how these elements "interact and change as a result of their interaction" (66; Giminez 202). The structural approach was the preferred approach in early studies of narratives (Giminez 202).

### **Labov's Narrative Structure**

Theorists who stress function over form in narrative analysis are, at least in part, reacting to the more structural approach developed by William Labov. Labov is arguably one of the premier scholars of variationist sociolinguistics in the world, but one of his earliest and the one best known outside of sociolinguistic circles is a paper he co-authored in 1967 with Joshua Waletzky on narrative analysis. Labov has since continued to refine and develop his approach to

narrative analysis, and almost all treatments of narrative analysis over the past 40 years cite Labov, even if they take a different approach to narrative than he does.

Labov defines narrative as “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred” (225). In the chapter “The Transformation of Experience in Narrative” in *The Discourse Reader*, Labov discusses a narrative as containing clauses which are “characteristically ordered in temporal sequence” (226). A “minimal narrative contains a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered. A change in the order will result in a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation” (Labov 226). If the original sequence of events included person A punching person B and then person B punching person A, then the narrative structure should follow that order. If in the telling of this event, the order gets switched to person B punching person A first, then the “inferred temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation is altered” (Labov 226).

Although some narratives contain only narrative clauses and are complete in the sense that they have a beginning, middle and end, according to Labov, a fully formed narrative contains six elements: 1) an abstract, 2) an orientation, 3) the complicating action, 4) an evaluation, 5) the result or resolution, and 6) a coda (221). An abstract consists of one or two clauses which summarize the story. The orientation contains the identification of the time, place, persons, and their daily activity or the situation. The orientation can be done in the course of the first several narrative clauses, or there can be an orientation section composed of free clauses. It can be placed at the beginning or strategically placed later (Labov 227). The complicating action is the central part of the story proper answering the question, what happened then (Labov 234)? The evaluation is the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative—why it

was told and what the narrator is getting at (Labov 227). The resolution tells what finally happened to conclude the sequence of events. The coda contains the free clauses found at the end of the narrative and signals that the narrative is finished. While a ‘canonical’ narrative will contain all six of these elements, actual narratives may or may not contain all of them and may or may not follow the exact order Labov describes.

Although many scholars agree that Labov and Waletzky’s study on narrative structure was pivotal, the study of narrative has become more and more interdisciplinary. Current research suggests several ways in which work on narrative may continue to develop. For one thing, discourse analysts continue to help us fill in the details so that we have a clear understanding of narrative structure and function as well as examining how narrative functions in different contexts. As Toolan states, “Labov and Waletzky acknowledge that narratives in their restricted sense are just one distinct kind of storytelling” (145). He believes that evaluation can occur anywhere in a narrative and may appear in different forms and at almost any point in the telling, although “it is often particularly clustered around the ‘hinge’ or climactic point of the action, just before—and in effect delaying—the resolving action or event. It is the pre-eminent constituent by means of which the narrator’s personal involvement in a story is conveyed” (Toolan 152). For Labov, the evaluation is how the narrator indicates the point of the narrative –why it was told and what the narrator is getting at (Toolan 152). “The extent to which the Labovian six-part formalist analysis of the oral narrative of personal experience applies or is relevant to literary narratives has also become a matter of some contention” (Toolan 167).

Toolan suggests that “relevance, rather than direct application, is the more helpful final emphasis” (167). He continues, “Narrators assert their authority to tell, to take up the role of knower, or entertainer, or producer, in relation to the addressee’s adopted role of learner or

consumer” (Toolan 3). Furthermore, he states that “Any narrator then is ordinarily granted, as a rebuttable presumption, a level of trust and authority which is also a granting or asserting of power” (Toolan 3).

Julio Gimenez, in his chapter “Narrative Analysis in Linguistic Research,” contends that while Labov’s structural framework is pivotal in narrative studies, if we study narratives as self-contained and isolated events, we miss making the connection between the narrative and the social issues that surround it. As Gimenez states, “by studying narratives as isolated events, we overlook the discursive connections between groups of narratives or discourse produced within the same sociolinguistic system and the social patterns that frame and sustain them” (Gimenez 199). Thus, in order to avoid the potential pitfall of isolating the sermons from a larger context, in addition to analyzing the narrative structure of each sermon, I interviewed the 21<sup>st</sup>-century preachers whose sermons I analyzed, I studied four homiletics texts that are in use today, and I utilized James Paul Gee’s theory of discourse analysis, which examines both the form and content of the text under analysis. (See Chapter 3 and Appendix B for this analysis).

### **Sermons as Narratives**

Each of the ten sermons examined in this study is a narrative written by a woman preacher. Each of these sermons is a sort of story which interprets the scripture and explores its meaning. The pulpit becomes a place where women, historically banned both from that place and from the discourse associated with it, can craft and deliver their version of the story of Christianity. Each preacher has to take into account the message that she wants to communicate and the audience to whom she is communicating. The Reverend Lucy Hogan teaches homiletics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. to students from a variety of

denominations and from a variety of backgrounds and she contends that this is the same type of diversity that a preacher faces each Sunday morning (132). Therefore, it makes sense that women preachers write and deliver their sermons from their perspectives shaped by experiences as individuals, as theologians, and as women; they take into account their congregation and the message that they are communicating.

Elaine Lawless has written articles about women and religion such as “Writing the Body in the Pulpit; Female-Sexed Texts,” “Transforming the Master Narrative; How Women Shift the Religious Subject,” and “Weaving Narrative Texts: The Artistry of Women’s Sermons.” She contends that when women speak in the religious context, they shift the “subject of religious discourse because the subject matter of religious discourse now includes the experiences of women” (Lawless 63). She explores the storytelling of women within the context of the pulpit—a context which has historically banned women:

The picture of the female storyteller out there, front and center, is more difficult to find. Most often scholarship reports how male researchers, particularly anthropologists, have failed to get the women’s stories because they have not had access to them, did not realize those contexts existed, or assumed that the more public male contexts were the culturally significant ones and therefore failed to talk with or listen to the women (Lawless 20).

Lawless observes that the women in her studies preach sermons based in the female experience, making them “women’s sermons” (22). Because of this factor, these sermons provide “an aspect in preaching that has seldom been articulated heretofore in the Christian world” (Lawless 22).

Lawless’ research is particularly valuable to my study because research into women’s sermons as narratives is sparse. In fact, as the research of female historians, specifically that of Catherine Brekus, show that women’s sermons as a genre of study have been largely overlooked. Contributing to this problem is the fact that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women’s sermons were often not written down. In cases where the sermon was written down, many times the manuscript was later



destroyed, overlooked, or simply lost. These sermons—or narratives of women preachers—were not valued for the meaning they might produce or the clues they might offer about women preachers.

Today, a study of the sermons of women preachers provides the opportunity to examine the extent to which the sermons of women preachers resemble narratives. Sermons offer a glimpse into what the author intended to communicate, and each sermon offers an opportunity to see how these women preachers make sense of their own experiences. Therefore, my examination of the narrative structure of women’s sermons provides a valuable contribution to a drastically under-investigated genre of discourse.

## **The Data**

Table 1 provides an overview of the ten sermons analyzed in this study, illustrating the narrative structural elements present in each sermon. The complete text of each sermon can be found in Appendix A.

### **Sermon 1: The Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, “The Path is Plain”, John 3:14, 15; September 30, 1877**

#### **S1-Summary**

In this sermon, Shaw reminds the congregation of the “history of the Hebrews while in bondage in the land of Egypt, of their deliverance by Moses and their wanderings in the wilderness” (Shaw 22). During their journey, the Hebrews became discouraged with all of the delays and the disappointments they encountered, and as Shaw explains, they “began to murmur and speak against the Lord and Moses...” (Shaw 23). In punishment, the Lord sent fiery serpents that bit people and many people died. The people then went to Moses and asked him to pray for

them so that God would take away the serpents. Moses prayed, and then God told Moses to put a brass serpent on a pole, and anyone bitten by a serpent could look at this brass serpent and live.

**Table 1: Summary of Labovian Structural Elements Present in Sermons Analyzed.**

	Abstract	Orientation	Action	Evaluation	Resolution	Coda
Sermon 1:Shaw	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sermon 2:Mott	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sermon 3:Frazier	Yes	Yes	Yes (2)	Yes (2)	Yes	Yes
Story within sermon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sermon 4: Frazier	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Story within sermon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sermon 5: Hogan	Yes	Yes	Yes (3)	Yes (3)	Yes	No
Sermon 6: Hogan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sermon 7: Hannan	Yes	Yes	Yes (2)	Yes (2)	Yes	Yes
Sermon 8: Hannan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sermon 9: Neely	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Story within sermon	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sermon 10: Neely	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Shaw compares the effects of a serpent’s bite to the effects of evil habits on the human heart. She states, “Sinners grow worse and worse not as their capacity is enlarged and their means to do evil is increased, but as the habit of vice acquires strength; until at last their nature

becomes so corrupt that out of it proceeds all actual transgressions” (Shaw 25). The brass serpent is lifted up and put on a pole. According to Shaw, there is no healing power in the serpent or in the act of looking, but the example shows the listeners that if they obey God’s command, they can be healed. Shaw also points out that “the serpent saved the Hebrew people from the effect of the evil while Jesus Christ saves from the evil itself” (27). Each Hebrew was free to look at the serpent. The same is true with God and his Christian people.

Shaw then tells the congregation that she read a narrative which illustrates this point of obeying God’s command. In the narrative, a man dreamed that he was falling from a cliff. He caught hold of a crag in the side of the cliff and hung on for a few minutes. A figure in white appeared to the man and said, “Let go.” The man did and was saved. Shaw explains that this is faith. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior shall not perish. The Reverend Shaw’s goal is to help her audience make the choice of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Shaw’s sermon is transparently about salvation. When Shaw preached this sermon in 1877, society was moving away from the church and women made up the largest number in congregations. Women argued at the time that since men were the established preachers and yet people were not attending church, it could not be so much worse if women became preachers.

### **S1-Structure**

**Abstract:** At the beginning of her sermon, Shaw quotes the Bible scripture from St. John III, 14,15: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Shaw 22). These lines sum up what the sermon will be about.

**Orientation:** This comes at the beginning of the sermon.

**Who:** Hebrews, Moses, Canaanites;

**What:** Hebrews in bondage, delivered by Moses, conquest of the Canaanites, destruction of Hebrews and their cities;

**Where:** land of Egypt, Mount Hor, Red Sea, wilderness.

**Action:** The Hebrews complained, God punished them by sending biting serpents, they appealed to Moses, God told Moses to make a serpent and put it on a pole and everyone who looked at it could be healed.

**Evaluation:** Shaw intervenes to explain the difficulty of naming this creature termed “nachash” in the Hebrew. She refers to the use of the word “Seraphim” in St. Paul’s words in Hebrews 1:7, and she explains the violent effects of being bitten by a serpent. She even uses a poem by the Roman poet Lucan to illustrate the terrible effects of the bite of these serpents. This evaluation is quite lengthy, taking up a large portion of the sermon. Shaw expounds on the interpretation of the word serpent, she compares the effects of the serpent’s bite to the effects of evil on the human heart, she compares the lifting up of the brass serpent on the pole to heal anyone who looked at it to crucifying Christ on the cross, and she ends up by explaining that God has promised eternal life to all who look to Jesus Christ and believe in him.

Shaw states, “So is salvation placed within the attainment of every individual of the human family. The path is plain, so plain that the [wayfaring] man though a fool need not err therein....We are invited, persuaded, commanded to obey his laws that we may be happy” (Shaw 28). Shaw summarizes the ideas she has presented about what faith really is and calls the congregation to cherish faith in God and in all his promises and prepare to dwell with God in heaven for Jesus will be there and his spirit of love.” Here, Shaw forecasts the future world of heaven and its spirit of love.

**Resolution:** This ends the narrative and quotes a verse of a hymn written by Dr. Doddridge. This poem reinforces Shaw's views of the future world, and it serves to end the sermon.

**Coda:** There is no coda.

As shown above, Shaw's sermon utilizes five of the six elements of a canonical Labovian narrative. Only a coda is absent.

## **Sermon 2: Lucretia Mott, "The Truth of God...The Righteousness of God"; Marlboro Chapel, Boston; September 23, 1841**

### **S2-Summary**

The theme of Lucretia Mott's sermon is that all who believe in the truth and righteousness of God can be set free. Mott asks if the reader fully understands and comprehends "how it is that only truth can make free indeed?" She admonishes the congregation that to fully understand this concept, they must set aside educational prejudices and sectarian predilections, noting that this might be particularly hard for the men to do. She explains that she is not preaching about righteousness as a Quaker tenet and she does not want to be a sectarian, but, rather, she seeks "to hold up principles of universal obligation." Mott addresses the common objection against women speaking out for what is right.

She refers to the Pauline passages (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) in the Bible, which say that if women want to learn, they need to ask their husbands questions when they get home. She believes Paul was addressing the ignorant women of Corinth, and that his words cannot be generalized. She directs her audience to read the Bible where they will find examples of women preaching and teaching throughout the Gospel. She also uses the example of the prophet Joel, whose words indicate that prophesying and preaching of both sexes was a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. Mott states that she looks forward to a time when women will rise and occupy the

sphere to which they are called because she says that women would then change and not just be the plaything of men anymore. They also would not easily be satisfied with domestic duty. Mott wants women to look seriously at themselves, and she believes this would equalize the sexes and influence future generations of women. Mott asserts that she is willing to be an object of ridicule if this helps other women become aware of their potential. She also makes reference to slavery, the Civil War, and society's lack of morals. She believes that if we wish to serve God, we shall carry out the principles of righteousness in service of our brethren and society. If we do his will, she believes we will have peace in our souls.

Mott's sermon is the boldest of all ten sermons in terms of taking a stand and talking about the issues important to her and to other women. Because Mott was a Quaker, a sectarian group which allowed women to preach, but didn't recognize ordination for either men or women, and did not have to fight to gain access to a pulpit, she might have felt freer to address controversial issues of the day.

## **S2-Structure**

**Abstract:** The title of the sermon, summing up what the sermon will be about: "The Truth of God...The Righteousness of God."

**Orientation:** Comes at the beginning of the sermon and states, "It is highly satisfactory to me, my friends, to meet you."

**Who:** preacher, congregation-friends;

**What:** preacher meets congregation;

**Where:** Marlboro Chapel. Although the location is not stated in this orientation, it is assumed, since the congregation knows where they are gathered together.

**Action:** The action begins with the words, “I rejoice to see...” and ends with “...for I have often been made sensible to feel how hard it is to ‘do the work of the Lord, where there is unbelief.’” This action causes the sermon to move forward. Mott tells the audience how glad she is to see her fellow-beings brought together “without the usual distinctions which prevail in professing Christendom” (Mott page?). The reader sees that truth can make us free, which requires setting aside sectarian predilections. Mott also tells the reader/listener that she does not present her ideas as a Quaker tenet, and she does not stand before us as a “sectarian, but to hold up principles of universal obligation.” This is the only reference Mott makes to her being a Quaker. The action also gives Mott a chance to refer to the objection held by many to women advocating for what they think is right.

**Evaluation:** This section is very lengthy and makes up most of Mott’s sermon. The evaluation begins with the words, “I know that many claim high apostolic authority against the action of women...” and ends with the words, “nothing doubting that if we do so, it will all be well with us hereafter.” Mott uses her sermon to talk about her desire to see women push for their equal rights in the public sphere and become more than a “plaything of man, and a frivolous appendage of society.” Mott carefully addresses Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians which had been used for centuries to prohibit women from holding leadership positions in the church. She strongly states that Paul’s words were appropriate when he told the Corinth women to ask questions of their husbands at home. However, she says that nowhere in Paul’s Letter does he say that women were not to preach or prophesy. She states, “So far from it, that he has expressly given them directions how to preach and prophesy...Anyone will, I think, see that to make a standing rule of the

apostle's directions to the ignorant Corinthian women, is to make him inconsistent with himself..." These are strong words being spoken by a woman in the pulpit of a church nine years before the first woman in America was ordained! She acknowledges that reform is hard, but she says that those in her congregation should not be discouraged. She explains that reform can be done as the will of God.

**Resolution:** This brings the narrative to a close. It states, "Further we need not too curiously inquire, but be content with the evidence of God's peace in our souls, after having done his will."

**Coda:** There is no coda.

Thus, Mott's sermon like Shaw's, exhibits five of the six elements of narrative structure outlined by Labov, omitting only the coda.

**Sermon 3: The Rev. Melissa Frazier, "God's Favorite Child", Luke 15:11, 12, January 10, 2010**

**S3-Summary**

In this sermon, Frazier asks, "How does one measure their spiritual journey?" She wishes that her readers/listeners could see and celebrate the walk they take with Christ like they celebrate birthdays. Frazier tells a personal story about an event that happened when she was eighteen years- old and starting college. Frazier, her roommate, her father, and her brother were eating dinner in a restaurant when a waitress mistook her for a much younger child. Frazier then relates this anecdote to the concept of our spiritual age.

The focus of the sermon then shifts to the story of the Prodigal Son. Frazier explains that this story is about three people: the youngest son, the oldest son, and the father. Specifically, Frazier focuses on the youngest son who asked his father for his share of the father's money and



leaves home. He spends all the money and, ashamed, comes back home where he is welcomed with open arms by his father. The oldest son sees this welcome and is jealous and complains to his father that he has been there all along and has never been given anything, to which the father responds that what he has is also his son's. Frazier makes the comparison between the father in the story of the Prodigal Son and God, the Father in Heaven. She also draws a parallel between the home of the two sons and our home with God, which is at God's side.

Frazier concludes that everyone is God's favorite child. We should treat each other like part of the family. "We need to see others as God sees them" (Frazier 4). We become like the Father by looking at the world through the eyes of God's love. Each one of us will always be God's favorite child. She asks, "Will we believe it and live it?" (Frazier page?).

### **S3-Structure**

**Abstract:** At the beginning of the sermon, Frazier asks, "How does one measure their spiritual journey? It's not like watching the aging process. Regardless of what age people think we are, we know every year that we're getting older. I wish we could see and celebrate our walk with Christ like we celebrate birthdays and other special days."

**Story within sermon:** Frazier inserts a personal story about an incident that took place in a restaurant. This story is actually a narrative itself.

**Abstract:** "Never have I felt a blow to my ego than when I was about to start college."

**Orientation:** "My roommate and I had just finished ...My five year old brother was with us."

**Action:** "When my dad received the check...the child's plate goes from 12 and under."

**Evaluation:** "Do you know what that does to an 18 year old, ready to start college in less than 24 hours?"

**Resolution:** “I wonder what age people see our faith?...How are you looking your spiritual age?”

**Coda:** There is no coda in this story.

**Orientation:** Frazier continues with the main narrative of the sermon. Her orientation begins with, “This story that Jesus tells in Luke has 3 characters...and ends with, “...Watch the shift take place in this story.”

**Who:** Jesus telling the story; youngest son, oldest son, father; parent; listener;

**What:** spiritual journey, resentment against a sibling, Burger King mentality;

**Where:** where we find ourselves today, distant country, God’s presence.

**Action #1:** The first action begins with the words, “Let’s journey with the younger son...” and ends with “...Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one.” The youngest son asks his father for his share of the estate and leaves home. We learn that this is a huge disgrace—as Frazier states, “This is by far the most hurtful, vindictive, offensive act anyone could have done in this culture.” Frazier asks the congregation if they can see themselves in the younger son.

**Evaluation #1:** Frazier interjects an explanation about the concept of “home” and how we are at home as long as we stay by God’s side. She also talks about the younger son realizing that he has lost everything, but he knows that he can return home.

**Action #2:** Frazier moves on in the journey to the oldest son. This begins with the words, “Journeying on, we find ourselves beside the cold shoulder of...” and ends with the words “...Obedience and duty are now a burden and service has become slavery.” We see the resentment of the oldest son towards his younger brother. He stayed home and worked for the father. He did all the right things. Yet, he complains to the father that he

has never been given anything. The younger son, however, was given a huge celebration when he returned home.

**Evaluation #2:** Frazier interprets this part of the journey in the story of the Prodigal Son, and she tells the congregation that both sons are the father’s favorite child just as everyone is God’s favorite child. The evaluation begins with “Friends, Joy and resentment cannot coexist...” and ends with “...They have already been beaten down enough either by their own inner or outer waywardness.”

**Resolution:** Frazier begins this with the words, “Can I accept that I am worth looking for?...” and ends with “...but the one who offers it as well.” This section ends the narrative and brings the sermon to a close.

**Coda:** “The fact is, each one of us will always be God’s favorite child. The challenge in the question is, will we believe it and then live it?”

This first sermon by Frazier illustrates a more complex structure than either of the preceding sermons. This one contains all six elements of narrative structure, but features two complicating actions rather than just one, each followed by its own evaluation, and an embedded narrative, itself containing five of the six elements of narrative structure.

**Sermon 4: The Rev. Melissa Frazier, “What Do You Need?” John 2:1-11, February 28, 2010**

**S4-Summary**

This second sermon by Melissa Frazier tells a personal story about Frazier’s college days when she was asked to be the lead hostess at her friend’s wedding reception. She then relates that story to the Gospel story of the wedding at Cana where Jesus performed the first of his miracles—turning water into wine. Jesus and his mother Mary are guests at the wedding, and

Mary is helping serve the guests. At some point, Mary realizes that there is no more wine: a situation which would have resulted in considerable embarrassment for the bridegroom. So Mary tells Jesus, “We have no wine.” And then she leaves the situation up to him to handle. Jesus tells the servants to fill the stone water jars to their brims and serve those to the chief steward. Jesus doesn’t touch the water jars and he doesn’t even say anything. The servants, dubious, nevertheless obey Jesus and take the water jars to the chief steward. He tastes the wine and finds it to be exceptional and even compliments the bridegroom for serving the best wine last.

Frazier then brings the congregation back to the present, making the point that all are God’s children and that after they ask God for what they need, they must expect and trust that God will answer. According to Frazier, her listeners will see miracles every day, and when they watch and are aware of their surroundings, they will become aware of the miracles. Frazier asks the congregation, “What have you brought empty this morning? What do you need filled in your life?”

#### **S4-Structure**

**Alternative opening:** Instead of beginning with an abstract, this sermon begins with an embedded personal narrative.

**Abstract:** Frazier states, “One of my friends got married my junior year in college.”

#### **Orientation:**

**Who:** college friend, Frazier, guests at the wedding, caterer, mother of the bride;

**What:** wedding of a college friend;

**Where:** wedding reception.

**Action:** There are not enough plates for the guests, the caterer can’t be found, Frazier washes plates as guests finish eating and replaces them.

**Evaluation:** Weddings come with high expectations that everything will go right.

**Resolution:** Weddings in the Old and New Testaments were different than weddings today, but both involved high expectations that things would be nice for the guests.

**Coda:** In the embedded narrative, there is no coda.

**Orientation:** Following the embedded narrative, Frazier continues the sermon. The orientation sets the scene and lets the reader know that Jesus, his mother Mary and some of the disciples are at a wedding in Cana. Mary is helping serve the guests. Then “Mary becomes aware of a horrible and major embarrassment to the wedding party—there is no wine. They are completely out.” Frazier tells the audience that running out of wine would bring embarrassment to the bride and the groom and even their children.

**Action:** The action begins with the words, “And here is Mary completely in the middle of this mess...” and ends with “...the bridegroom has now become a hero because of this fabulous wine.” This action portion of the sermon depicts the miracle Jesus performed—he turned water into wine for the wedding guests. As Frazier states, “There are no fireworks. No abracadabras. According to this passage, Jesus doesn’t even touch the water or the jars.”

**Evaluation:** The evaluation begins with the words, “What do you need?” and ends with the words “...Verse 11: ““And his disciples believed him.”” Here, Frazier shows the reader that God cares about our needs. God wants to be a part of our everyday lives. She concludes that miracles happen every day and “when we watch and become aware of our surroundings, we’ll see and experience them. God won’t always answer through a burning bush or through a parted sea.”

**Resolution:** This brings the narrative to a close. It explains that the purpose of the telling of the miracles by John in his Gospel is to teach us about Jesus so that we can have an eternal relationship with God. We have to ask for what we need and then we have to wait for God to answer in his own time.

**Coda:** “What have you brought empty this morning? What do you need filled in your life?”

Although this sermon contains an embedded narrative which contains an abstract, it is the only one of the ten sermons in this study which does not begin with an abstract. However, it contains all the other elements of narrative structure.

**Sermon 5: The Rev. Lucy Lind Hogan, “Important Nobodies”, Proper 27B (Lectionary Year B, part of a prescribed reading on a three-year cycle for every Sunday in the year: year B focuses on Mark), November 8, 2009**

### **S5-Summary**

This sermon is a story about the “important nobodies” in the world. Hogan sets the scene for the congregation: It is a hot afternoon. The Temple courtyard is shimmering with heat. The rabbi (Jesus/teacher) and some of disciples are gathered in a corner. Jesus points to an older woman in the courtyard. Peter looks up to see this woman and decides that she is nobody. After all, she is a poor widow. The widow waits until the heat of the afternoon when she knows the important people will be indoors where it is cool. Frazier tells the congregation, “She did not want them to see the meager offering she made. How could her two copper coins compare to the huge gifts that had built the temple?” (Hogan, Sermon 5). Jesus points out the widow to his disciples, and he praised her for giving all that she had compared to the rich people who gave only a portion of what they had.

Hogan then refers to the Bible text for the day which tells the story of three women and reminds the listeners that it is unusual for Bible text to be about women. Hogan reminds the

audience that a widow was the biggest nobody of all in Biblical times. In this Bible story, the three women are Naomi and Ruth—both widows—and the unnamed old woman in the courtyard. Hogan tells us that human nobodies are God’s somebodies because the Lord looks at the heart, not the outward appearance. We (mortals) look at appearance, bank accounts, position in the community, and titles. An important nobody is someone who is loving, faithful and resourceful. Hogan tells the listener/reader that Naomi and Ruth loved and helped each other. They returned to Bethlehem and Naomi arranged for Ruth to meet a relative of her husband’s. He (Boaz) fell in love with Ruth. Ruth turns out to be the great, great... great grandmother of Jesus.

At the beginning of the sermon, we see that Ruth’s great, great... great grandson Jesus perceived a nobody in the courtyard to be an important somebody. This widow offered 2 mites which was all she had. She was an important somebody. “She has given God her all” (Hogan 11). Hogan concludes that we are all important nobodies. She states, “Naomi, Ruth, this unnamed widow... They loved God with all their hearts, souls, minds, strength. They loved their sisters, mothers, neighbors, and they teach us all how to be important nobodies” (Hogan page?).

### **S5-Structure**

**Abstract:** Hogan quotes a portion of Psalm 146:8-9. The first lines are, “The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; upholding the orphan and the widow...”

**Orientation:** The orientation begins with the words, “The scorching heat of the afternoon sun shimmered in the Temple courtyard...” and ends with “...sitting about the feet of their rabbi, their teacher.”

**Who:** rabbi/teacher, group, crowds

**Where:** corner of the Temple courtyard

**When:** afternoon

**Action #1:** Jesus points across the courtyard at an elderly widow who had waited until the courtyard was almost empty to make her meager contribution. The disciple Peter looks up, expecting to see someone important. He dismisses the widow as nobody. The action begins with, “‘There, look,’ Jesus motioned...” and ends with “...she was nobody.”

**Evaluation #1:** Hogan refers back to the Gospel read in church that day which told the story of three women. She reminds the reader/listener that it is unusual “in the scriptures to hear the stories of all women. But, if you want to talk about the least of the least-no one was more least, more nobody than a woman, than a widow.” Naomi and Ruth were both widows who helped each other survive. Hogan compares their status to women in some parts of the world today who cannot go outside without a male escort, even if that escort is a younger brother. Hogan also talks about contemporary times and that many people seem to want to be famous. The evaluation begins with the words, “This morning we have heard...” and continues through “...What was she to do?”

**Action #2:** Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem together and Naomi arranges for Ruth to meet Boaz, her husband’s relative. Boaz falls in love with Ruth and marries her. Now, Naomi and Ruth have a new, wonderful life.

**Evaluation #2:** The second evaluation begins with the line, “The reason we tell their story is the second lesson we learn from these nobodies...” and ends with “...And, finally, an important nobody, God’s somebody, gives all to God.” Hogan tells the reader/listener the definition of an important nobody is that their actions have consequences that they might never see.



**Action #3:** The audience sees that many generations later, the great, great... great grandson of a nobody (Ruth) was seated in the courtyard observing another nobody—the unnamed widow contributing all that she had. Jesus tells his disciples, “Peter, James, John, if you want to be important, if you want to sit on my right hand, do as she has done. Do not do as the scribes do. Do as this important nobody has done.”

**Evaluation #3:** The third evaluation begins with, “While two coins will seem insignificant to the treasurer...” and ends with “...And we are to give all we have, are, wish to be to God and God’s people.”

**Resolution:** Hogan tells the audience that these three women in the Bible scripture teach us all how to be important nobodies.

**Coda:** There is no coda.

This sermon contains all the narrative elements designated by Labov except for the coda, and the sermon is complicated by having no fewer than three distinct action/evaluation sequences.

**Sermon 6: The Rev. Lucy Lind Hogan, “Matters of Death and Life”, Proper 8B, (Lectionary Year B, part of a prescribed reading on a three-year cycle for every Sunday in the year: year B focuses on Mark), Mark 5:21-43, June 28, 2009**

### **S6-Summary**

In this sermon, audience hears about Mark’s Gospel. Mark recounts stories in which Jesus “went out into the world teaching and preaching and healing.” He healed the mother-in-law of his friend Simon Peter, a paralytic, and several lepers, so crowds surrounded him wherever he went. Within the sermon, Hogan tells a personal story about speaking to her best friend, a pastor, who was dealing with matters of death and life: preaching a funeral for a twenty-eight year old member of her church, killed in a collision with a truck; finding out that the husband of her

church secretary had died suddenly at age 55; the church secretary in the middle of undergoing chemotherapy treatments for cancer; and a parishioner whose sister died suddenly. Hogan relates this personal story to matter of life and death depicted in Mark's Gospel. Jairus's daughter was dying, so he ran to get Jesus. Jairus was a synagogue leader, and he was wealthy and powerful. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and asked him to come and lay his hands on his daughter.

Meanwhile, a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years had heard about Jesus' healing power. She did not think she was worthy of asking him for help, so she just touched the hem of his cloak. The woman was healed because of her faith. The little girl died, but Jesus brought her back to life. Hogan mentions that people get well every day, and some people don't get well and die. The audience learns about 14-year old Mattie Stepanek who died of a rare disease but was an inspiration to other people. The audience is told that they have been invited to live "with a hopeful spirit for life bringing comfort, solace to all around us and joining Jesus in the healing of the world."

### **S6-Structure**

**Abstract:** Hogan states, "Out of the depths I cry to you, Oh, Lord...Out of the depths we cry."

**Orientation:** The orientation comes at the beginning of the sermon. This begins with, "Mark tells us the story of Jesus..." and ends with, "...Mark tells us that Jesus healed anyone."

**Who:** Mark, Jesus, singing angels, adoring kings, tender, loving mother, John the Baptist, baptizer, Spirit, the reader, anyone.

**What:** story of Jesus, the story of life and death and life again, baptism, Mark's good news, Mark's gospel, Jesus healing, teaching, preaching.

**Where:** to be here with you this morning, manger, stable, wilderness Kingdom of God has come near, the world.

**Action:** The action tells the audience that Jesus healed lepers, a mother –in-law of his friend Simon Peter, and a paralytic. Jairus—a leader of the synagogue, a ruler of the people and an important man was looking for Jesus. His daughter was dying. Hogan states that Jairus “pushed his way through the jostling crowd. People were everywhere; people trying to get close to Jesus. They were crying out- shouting- “Look this way. Touch me. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.”” Jairus threw himself at the feet of Jesus and pleaded with him to come lay his hands on his daughter so that could be cured. In a parallel story, a poor, unnamed woman had been bleeding for twelve years. She was ignored by others who thought she was unclean. She just wanted to touch the hem of Jesus’ robe. She thought that if she did, she might be healed.

**Evaluation:** The evaluation begins with, “Mark tells us the story of these people- a desperate loving father...” and ends with “... ‘What a gift,’” says Mattie. This evaluation is quite long. Hogan mentions that getting involved in discussions about the current health care debate is one way that the listeners/readers can be people of death and life. The audience is told that miracles happen every day and people are healed of cancer, and have successful surgery, and recover from heart attacks. They are also told that some people don’t get healed. Mattie Stepanek was a fourteen-year old boy who died from a rare illness. Hogan states that Mattie touched the lives of many people during his short life. “To be the people of death and life is to know how important is that beautiful circle of God, of families and friends...Through God’s love and support we are able to be that beautiful circle.”

**Resolution:** Hogan states, “This morning we have been invited, once again, to live lives of death and life. Jesus is reaching out to each one of us, little boy, little girl, men, women he calls, ‘get up.’”

**Coda:** “Get up and live with a hopeful spirit for life bringing comfort, solace to all around us and joining Jesus in the healing of the world!”

This sermon contains all six narrative elements and features a particularly lengthy evaluation.

**Sermon 7: The Rev. Shauna Hannan, Sermon from the ELCA Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly (no title), Acts 11: 1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35, May 2010**

### **S7-Summary**

In her sermon, Hannan reminds the audience of the Last Supper, at which Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and tells them that one of them will betray him. Hannan tells the listeners that Jesus gives us a gift in the form of a commandment that we love one another. Love is not new, but to love one another the way that Jesus loves us is new. Loving one another as Jesus loves us is not easy. Peter discovers that one thing capable of getting in the way of us loving one another is our idea of the inner circle (family of God) is smaller than God’s perspective of the inner circle. Hannan then reminds the congregation of the scripture in Acts 11; 1-18 which describes Peter’s vision and his journey to Caesara to preach to the Gentiles.

The audience understands that we have no power to stand in the way of God. Hannan explains that this Synod (gathering in Florida) attends to the how and with whom of Jesus’ new commandment –the vision of the local congregation or group of congregations working with another part of the Synod to figure out how to love one another as Jesus loves. Hannan concludes

by telling the reader that we should know the phrase “Love one another” in Greek: “agapate allelous”.

## **S7-Structure**

**Abstract:** “The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter.

**Orientation:** Hannan sets the scene for her sermon with a brief summary of the Last Supper.

**Who:** Jesus, disciples, Judas

**What:** Passover, Last Supper, washes the feet of disciples, hands Judas bread, Judas leaves the room, bread is the sign of betrayal

**Where:** a room away from the public

**Action #1:** It begins with the words, “When I ask students in preaching class what makes our Christian faith distinctive...” and ends with “... ‘that you love one another as I have loved you.’” In this action, Hannan explains that the students in her preaching class identified love as thing that makes the Christian faith distinct. She states that since Jesus was born in Bethlehem, crucified, and risen, we can say we have the market on a certain kind of love. Jesus told us to love one another the way he loves us.

**Evaluation #1:** The first evaluation begins with, “It is not an exhortative (finger pointing)...” and ends with “...How important it is that everyone know they are Disciples of Christ.”

**Action #2:** Hannan details the vision Peter had of a vision in which beasts and fowls appeared, and a voice told him to kill and eat. Peter knows that this would violate Jewish custom, so he refuses. He tells God that nothing unclean or profane has entered his mouth. God then tells him not to call profane what he has made clean. Peter travels to Caesara after Centurion summoned him. He preached to the Gentiles there and the Holy Ghost fell on them.

**Evaluation #2:** The second evaluation begins with, “Peter had learned and lived the ...”and ends with “...God, the alpha and the omega, is worthy to be praised by us and all creation.” In this evaluation, the listener hears Hannan relate the synod gathering with their “Together in Mission” slogan to the idea of God’s inner circle.

**Resolution:** The resolution begins with, “So that God might be glorified, as Jesus loves you, agapate allelous...” and ends with “...And for the sixth we turn to the cross which says it all-beyond words. Agapate allelous.”

**Coda:** The coda consists of one word: “Hallelujah.”

This sermon contains all of the elements of narrative structure, and includes two fully formed actions with their respective evaluations. This is the first sermon in the study, in which the coda consists of only one word: “Hallelujah.”

**Sermon 8: The Rev. Shauna Hannan, Written for Holy Cross Day (no title); John 3:13-17; September 18, 2008**

**S8-Summary**

This sermon tells the story of Holy Cross Day which has been celebrated in the Western Church since the seventh or eighth century. It is a feast day that began in Jerusalem in the year 400 nearly a century after the alleged discovery of the actual cross on which Jesus was crucified. Hannan states that 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians do “hold dear this paradoxical symbol of death and life” (Hannan page?). Holy Cross Day allows Christians to contemplate the worry of the cross.

Hannan tells the story of her misunderstanding of the purpose of the cross when she was nine years old. She felt that she had to live a life of misery to imitate the suffering of Christ on the cross. She states that other people misinterpret the cross as well. It has been used to justify the abuse of others, and people have used the cross to justify someone abusing them. But, the

audience hears that, “The power of the saving cross of Jesus Christ heals, invigorates, liberates. God did not send Jesus to condemn the world, but to save it” (Hannon, Sermon #9). We get unbounded craze, endless mercy and an arm-stretching embrace wide enough to save the whole world. That is paradise.

### **S8-Structure**

**Abstract:** The abstract begins with, “Grace to you and peace from the crucified and risen one, Jesus, who is the Christ...” and ends with “...If only the plural of the paradox were paradise.” Orientation: In this orientation, Hannan sets the scene by reminding the reader/hearer of the origins of Holy Cross Day.

**Who:** We, Emperor Constantine’s mother, seminary professor, deacons, pilgrims, 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christians, preacher.

**What:** Holy Cross Day, Western Church, church guarding the cross against a bite from a pilgrim, domestication of the cross, Lent, wood chip, paradoxical symbol of death and life.

**Where:** Jerusalem, home.

**Action:** Hannan uses an example of herself at 9 years old. She thought that a prerequisite for being a Christian was being miserable. She had misinterpreted the cross. She realized that she was not cut out for a life of languish and resigned herself to the thought that she couldn’t be a “true” Christian. The action begins with the words, “When I was 9 years old...” and ends with “...resigned to thinking that I couldn’t be a ‘true’ Christian.”

**Evaluation:** This evaluation illustrates that many people misinterpret the cross. Sometimes, they do it to justify abuse, and some people use the cross to justify abuse inflicted upon them.

The truth is that the cross heals, invigorates and liberates. Hannan also tells the listener that the cross interprets us.

**Resolution:** This resolution begins with the words “Incarnate Divinity, Crucified Lord, Saving Cross....” And ends with, “...That is paradise.”

**Coda:** “Amen.”

This sermon contains all six narrative elements. In both this and Hannan’s first sermon, the coda consists of a single word, in the former case, “Hallelujah”, and in this case, “Amen.”

**Sermon 9: The Rev. Wanda Neely, “When Christmas Comes for Everyone”, Micah 5:2-5a; Philippians 2: -11, December 20, 2009**

### **S9-Summary**

Neely begins this sermon with a story about how she put herself on sabbatical from her job as pastor at a Presbyterian Church and took a temporary chaplaincy position at the local hospital. Her duties there include meeting the routine pastoral needs of patients, answering codes, and being present at traumas and at withdrawals of life support. The on-call chaplain is also responsible for leading the service in the chapel on Sundays. Neely explains that she had to lead a service on a Sunday during Advent. During Advent, a candle is lighted each Sunday. In the hospital, she couldn’t light real candles in the chapel as she was supposed to do, so she made do with electric candles instead. Neely explains that for families at the hospital, this Advent season has not gone the way it was supposed to go. She wonders how the season is going for the congregation.

Neely tells the audience that, “we are part of the song that began long before we arrived and will continue long after we are gone. And in no time in the development of any version of that song were things ever as people thought they were supposed to be” (Neely, Sermon I).



Christmas comes not as we expect, but the way it has to be. She relates a story from a book about two baptisms in a fictitious church. During Advent, two babies entered the church, not the way they were supposed to, but the way they needed to. Neely states that Christmas will enter our lives the way it needs to and bring the message that God is here, making it work.

### **S9-Structure**

**Abstract:** The abstract is the title: “When Christmas Comes for Everyone.”

**Orientation:** The orientation begins with, “When I realized my work of helping the church...” and ends with the words, “...in chaplaincy at Pitt County Memorial Hospital.”

**Who:** Neely, chaplaincy

**What:** sabbatical leave, temporary position

**Where:** Pitt County Memorial Hospital

**Action:** Neely tells a personal story of her working as a hospital chaplain and needing to hold a service one Sunday during Advent. She couldn't use real candles as she was supposed to, so she had to use electric candles, the way it needed to be done. She draws a parallel to the lives of the patients in the hospital. This Advent, their season is not going the way it was supposed to. We hear that our lives rarely go as we plan. Neely tells the audience that we are all part of a song that began long ago, and in no version of that song have things gone the way they are supposed to.

**Evaluation #1:** The first evaluation begins with, “That is how Christmas comes, not as we expect...” and ends with “...And you are a church who gets that.” She explains that Christmas began not as we might expect. The Son of God came to us as a tiny baby, born in a stable to poor parents with the birth announcement delivered by angels to shepherds in a field.

Next, Neely tells a story within the story. One story provides the framework for the second story.

**Orientation:** The orientation in the embedded narrative states that the story comes from the book *The Good News from North Haven* by Michael Lindvall. It describes a year in the life of a fictional Presbyterian Church. The chapter is titled “Christmas Baptism.”

**Action:** The action begins with the words, “One Sunday in November Reverend David...” and ends with the words, “...And every eye in the sanctuary was on the child, who was for that moment everybody’s baby.” This story is about two babies who were baptized during Advent in this fictional Presbyterian Church. Neither happened the way they were supposed to, but both happened in the way it needed to be done. The first baby was the grandson of the elder for life Angus McDowell. His son and daughter-in-law lived in another city, but they had not found a church there. He asked if his church could baptize the baby. The pastor turned him down, but Angus went to the church elders and persuaded them to baptize his grandson. After the service, the Pastor walked back through the church and found a woman sitting there. They talked, and the woman asked if her grandson could be baptized. Her daughter wasn’t married, but had gotten pregnant at age 18. The pastor took the matter to the elders, and they approved the baptism. When the baby’s mother Tina brought Jimmy forward to be baptized, she was nervous. Tina was young and alone. But when the pastor asked, “Who stands with this child?” The grandmother Mildred stood, but then so did Angus, his wife and soon, the entire congregation was standing up to support baby Jimmy.

**Evaluation:** The evaluation states, “Two babies entered that church family that Advent.”

**Resolution:** The resolution states, “Neither the way they were ‘supposed’ to; both the way they needed to.”

**Coda:** There is no coda in this embedded narrative.

Following the embedded narrative, Neely returns the reader to her sermon.

**Evaluation #2:** The second evaluation begins with, “We come to the end of a year...” and ends with “...but they did.”

**Resolution:** The resolution begins with, “And that is where...” and ends with, “making it work.”

**Coda:** “Amen.”

Neely’s sermon contains all the narrative elements and exhibits two major variations on the standard narrative structure. The first variation is the embedding of a narrative immediately following the first evaluation, and the second variation is the insertion of a further evaluation following the conclusion of the embedded narrative.

**Sermon 10: The Rev. Wanda Neely, “Fleeing From the Presence of the Lord?”; Psalm 139:7-10; Jonah 1:7-10, February 28, 2010**

### **S10-Summary**

This sermon was preached on the second Sunday of Lent, and its focus is the book of Jonah. The preacher reviews the story in Jonah: God asks Jonah to go to preach in Ninevah. Jonah asks God if he can go anywhere, but to Ninevah. Neely explains that the Ninevites destroyed Jonah’s family. Jonah ends up on a sinking ship headed in the wrong direction because he is running from God’s calling. Neely tells the audience that we cannot outdistance God. Jonah allows himself to be thrown overboard in an attempt to save the others. Neely then relates the story of Francis Thompson, who wanted to be a priest, but found out he was unqualified. He

then tried medicine, but he failed again. He was angry and bitter and he gave up on God. He wrote a poem about running away from God, until he found God again.

Next, Neely relates the personal story of when she lived near Charlotte, and there was a landing pad for emergency helicopters in her backyard. Emergency vehicles, police cars, and volunteers would surround the field with their vehicles and shine headlights on the emergency landing pad so that the pilot could see where to land. Neely never understood how that pilot could find the little patch of concrete with just headlights shining on it. Neely concludes that we are Jonah, but we can't out run God. We discover that God has been with us all along.

### **S10-Structure**

**Abstract:** The abstract begins with the title, "Fleeing From the Presence of the Lord?" and ends with "...we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen."

**Orientation:** The orientation begins with the words, "It is the second Sunday in Lent, the second of six Sundays and 40 days..." and ends with "...Thanks be to God." Neely explains that the congregation is focusing on the book of Jonah during Lent. She provides background to what the congregation is reading that Sunday. Jonah was called by God to go to Ninevah, but instead he ran in the opposite direction. God hurled a great wind on the ship, and it began to sink.

**Who:** Jonah, congregation, God, ship captain.

**What:** story of calling, repentance and rebirth, pew Bible, Old Testament, ship, storm, sinking ship, journey.

**When:** second Sunday in Lent, preparation for Easter.

**Action:** The action begins with the words, "William Carl, president of our Presbyterian seminary in Pittsburgh, says that Jonah is his kind of missionary: reluctant, withdrawn, stubborn.

Never quite ready to go where God is calling him..." and ends with "...Nothing works." Neely tells the reader/listener that the Bible is full of stories of people who obeyed God's command. But not Jonah. Jonah runs in the opposite direction from where God wants him to be. Neely explains that Jonah has good reason: the Ninevites destroyed Jonah's family. As she states, "The Ninevites committed the Holocaust of the Old Testament. Jonah comes out of the Dachau and Auschwitz of his day, and God says, " 'I want you to go preach my word to Ninevah.'" And Jonah says, " 'Anywhere, Lord, anywhere but Ninevah.'" God sends a storm which threatens to sink the ship Jonah is on. The sailors throw cargo overboard and ask Jonah to appeal to his God. Jonah allows himself to be thrown overboard. Neely then provides an example of Francis Thompson who tried to be a priest but failed, and then attempted a profession in medicine but failed at that as well. He gave up on God. He lived like a derelict on the streets of London for three years and had an opium habit. Some friends conducted an intervention and brought him back to God.

**Evaluation:** The evaluation begins with the words, "The first step in finding and knowing God is admitting that you run from God..." and ends with "...the Hound of Heaven will find you."

**Resolution:** The resolution contains a brief, personal example of a time when Neely lived in upstate South Carolina, and there was a landing pad in her backyard for emergency helicopters that came from Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte. At night, emergency workers and some volunteers would circle that landing pad with their vehicles and shine their headlights on the pad so the helicopter pilot could see where to land. Neely then tells the reader/listener that whether "you turn on the lights or not, God will find

you...We are Jonah.” The resolution ends with “This Lent, wherever you are running, whether it is toward something or away from something. I pray that you will let God find you.”

**Coda:** “Amen.”

Neely’s sermon contains all six of the standard narrative structures.

## **Discussion**

Through the presentation of the data compiled from this study of women’s sermons, it can be seen that each of these sermons can be classified as a narrative, according to the structural elements designated by Labov. However, even though all of the women in this study use the standard narrative elements in their sermons, they each use those elements in their own way, complicating them in some cases with embedded narratives, and in other cases with more than one action/evaluation sequence.

For example, Shaw adds her unique preaching voice to her sermon by utilizing a detailed explanation of the serpent and its importance in this scripture in the evaluation portion of her sermon. Her sermon does not contain a coda as she ends with a poem by a Congregationalist minister. In Sermon 2, Mott also chooses not to include a coda in her sermon, and her evaluation section is quite lengthy, making up the majority of her sermon. Her evaluation is used primarily to argue for women’s rights to equality in the public sphere. She is the only preacher who uses her sermon to argue so strongly for a societal change.

In both of Melissa Frazier’s sermons, she uses personal stories that are embedded narratives, and each embedded narrative is self contained. Neither embedded narrative contains a coda. They are not used again later in the sermons or referred to throughout the sermon, but the

embedded narratives do provide a framework and a starting point for the sermon that follows. Frazier then introduces the scripture and begins to interpret that scripture and to relate it to the congregation. Frazier does not use her sermon language to identify her gender or to talk about gender-related social issues. Her focus is solely on the scripture and on what she can teach the congregation about how the scripture relates to them personally.

Frazier does not preach every Sunday, and when she does preach it is usually at the contemporary service to a congregation of 60-80 members. Before accepting her job at the Memorial Baptist Church in Greenville, North Carolina, Frazier was the first woman to be ordained at Immanuel Baptist Church in Greenville, North Carolina, at the age of 25. When the male pastor retired, Frazier became the only full time staff member. As she states, “For 16 months I was all there was. But I’m equipped. I’m called” (Frazier: May 7, 2010). Frazier says that she does not believe that there is a certain formula for writing sermons. She reads the scripture passage and figures out what it is trying to say. She then reads a 30-40 page exegesis and looks at context and culture. She says, “I’m a simple thinker. I always preach on a 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade level—not dumbing it down. But authenticity is so important to me...I put lots of time into it [preaching]. I ask, what is the purpose today? How can this help me live better? There is a lot of thinking and then one night, ‘A-ha!!’” (Frazier: May 7, 2010).

Gender is not an issue in either of the sermons written by Lucy Hogan: she does not use her sermon as a vehicle to advance a feminist agenda or to talk about her struggles as a female preacher. Instead, Hogan focuses on the Psalm and on the Bible scripture. While Hogan doesn’t use embedded narratives of personal stories, she does expand the narrative structure to encompass three actions with their respective evaluations. With regard to her process of writing sermons, Hogan states, “I’m given a set of lessons that I have to wrestle with (referring to the

Lectionary texts assigned for each Sunday in the year). I don't get to pick a topic or an issue. I don't do that. I am given a text" (Hogan: November 2, 2010).

Hogan does use some personal examples in her sermons which include her reference to the fact that she is now a grandmother, her reference to her husband being a doctor, and her reference to her best friend, a female pastor. Each of these references is used to enhance her sermons: she relates being a grandmother to the story of three widows in the Bible story; she relates her role as a doctor's wife her reference to the health care debate, and she relates her pastor friend as someone who has been dealing with real life issues of death and life to the Biblical accounts of life and death.

The Reverend Shauna Hannan does not make extended personal stories a part of her sermons, nor does she choose to use embedded narratives. On the website [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), Hannan reflects on using personal stories in preaching:

There are times when a preacher's experience illuminates the Gospel in such a way that the Gospel could not have been illuminated without that personal story. And then, of course, I'm grateful that that person/preacher was willing to share her story. If that personal story makes the preacher the protagonist over and above Jesus Christ, that's a problem... So when personal stories point to Jesus Christ, what it does, is it reflects how God works in the lives of real people, including the preacher...In any kind of oral communication...you've got to connect to the people...(2009).

Her sermon style is perhaps the most straightforward, and in both of her sermons, she uses only a one-word coda.

Hannan does not use her sermons to advance her own agenda as a woman preacher. In her sermon from May 2, 2010, she refers briefly to the preaching class that she teaches. She does not state, "As a female professor of preaching..." She does not make this reference gender-related. Nor does she belabor the fact that she is a professor. She says, "When I ask students in preaching class what makes our Christian faith distinctive....And then I ask..." (Hannan: May



2010). Perhaps this is Hannan's way of establishing credibility for preaching. Or, perhaps this is just an illuminating example of the lesson she is preaching. She does use a personal example, but it does not turn on the fact of her gender; in fact, she refers to her gender only once when she says, "I was an energetic, grateful, well-loved young gal who one day decided she would show her true Christian spirit by moping, donning a sour face, reveling in telling others about my shortcomings and failures" (Hannan, Sermon 8).

In Sermon 9, the Reverend Wanda Neely does choose to use a personal story to begin her sermon and to set up her interpretation of the scripture lesson. After the first evaluation, Neely also uses an embedded narrative which contains all elements of narrative structure except a coda. In this sermon, Neely utilizes two major variations on standard narrative structure; first, she embeds a narrative immediately following the first evaluation; and second, she inserts a second evaluation following the conclusion of the embedded narrative.

Neely chooses to preach without using a manuscript. She explains that she writes her sermons out to organize herself, but then memorizes her outline. Neely also chooses to not use a pulpit. At her last church, there was an "obscenely high pulpit" (Neely: May 2010), so she quit using the pulpit. Now, the pulpit gets in the way for her. Neely says that when writing a sermon, she "wrestles with the text until it blesses me!" (Neely: May 2010). Neely says that she "loves narratives from the scripture. I keep coming back to preferred styles—mine is narrative, storytelling...I know when I get excited about the sermon, then I can deliver it with conviction. I've got to own it" (Neely: May 2010).

While each of these six women uses narrative structure for their sermons, they each adapt that structure to their individual voice. Each of these women carefully crafts her sermon so that her own style is clear. Only Lucretia Mott chose to argue pointedly against society's view of

women's place and to interpret scripture for her congregation. Each of the other women focused only on her interpretation of the scripture for the day. It is valuable to note that these women's sermons do meet the criteria of the structural elements designated by Labov. It is also valuable to note that these women adapted the narrative structure to suit their preaching styles.

## CHAPTER 3: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: THE DATA

### Introduction

James Paul Gee details his theory of language use in society in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. In contrast to generative linguists, who dismiss naturally occurring language as being too “messy” to study, Gee believes that language is only worth studying if it is in practice, as discourse, and he explains how and why language works the way it does when it is put into action. Gee states that as “discourse analysts, we are interested in analyzing situations in which language is used...” (97). He clarifies:

The sorts of situations in which we are interested are, then: an activity or related set of activities... in which people take on certain identities or roles..., contract certain sorts of relationships with each other..., and use certain sorts of sign systems and forms of knowledge... In such a situation, people and things take on certain meanings or significance..., things are connected or disconnected, relevant or non--- relevant to each other in various ways..., and various sorts of social goods are at stake in various ways... (Gee 97).

Gee differentiates between “Discourse” and “discourse”, and this is one of the insights for which he is best known. In his usage, “discourse” refers to the use of language on the spot to enact identities, activities, and perspectives, but he also observes that language by itself is rarely enough to enact identities and activities. To create a “Discourse” requires that one employ appearance, tonality, gestures, clothing, body language, symbols, tools, technology, etc. along with the language. According to Gee, “A ‘Discourse’ then becomes the non- language ‘stuff’ melded with the language” (7).

Gee claims that language has a “magical” property, which is reflexivity (10). He contends that, “when we speak or write, we design what we have to say to fit the situation in which we are communicating. But, at the same time, how we speak or write creates that very situation. It seems, then, that we fit our language to a situation that our language, in turn, helps to create in

the first place” (Gee 10). Which comes first? Gee’s answer is that “language and institutions bootstrap each other into existence in a reciprocal process through time” (10). Gee contends that a single piece of data can be interpreted several ways depending on the method and the analyst.

### **Gee’s Theory of Discourse Analysis**

Gee proposes a method of discourse analysis in which he identifies seven building tasks and six tools of inquiry. His seven building tasks are: significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge (Gee 11). The six tools of inquiry are situated meaning, social language, discourse models, intertextuality, discourses, and conversations (Gee 20). For Gee,

Essentially, a discourse analysis involves asking questions about how language, at a given time and place, is used to construe the aspects of the situation network as realized at that time and place and how the aspects of the situation network simultaneously give meaning to that language. A discourse analysis involves, then, asking questions about the seven building tasks..., using the tools of inquiry we have discussed (situated meetings, social languages, discourse models, intertextuality, Discourses, and conversations) and thinking about any other language details of the data that appear relevant (110).

Gee proposes twenty six questions, grouped into seven building tasks for an analyst to ask while conducting a discourse analysis (110). The analyst is seeking to understand from the text the ways in which the speaker/writer of the text builds meanings in and through the text. The twenty-six questions are as follows:

#### **Building significance**

1. What are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in the situation?
2. What situated meanings and values seem to be attached to places, times, bodies, people, objects, artifacts, and institutions relevant in this situation?

3. What situated meanings and values are attached to other oral and written texts quoted or alluded to in the situation (intertextuality)?
4. What Discourse models seem so be at play in connecting and integrating these situated meanings to each other?
5. What institutions and/or Discourses are being (re-)produced in this situation and how are they being stabilized or transformed in the act?

#### Building activities

6. What is the larger or main activity (or set of activities) going on in the situation?
7. What sub-activities compose this activity (or these activities)?
8. What actions compose these sub-activities and activities?

#### Building identities

9. What identities (roles, positions) with their concomitant personal, social, and cultural knowledge and beliefs (cognition), feelings (affect), and values, seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?
10. How are these identities stabilized or transformed in the situation?
11. In terms of identities, activities, and relationships, what Discourses are relevant (and irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

#### Building relationships

12. What sorts of social relationships seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?
13. How are these social relationships stabilized or transformed in the situation?

14. How are other oral or written texts quoted or alluded to so as to set up certain relationships to other texts, people or Discourses?
15. In terms of identities, activities, and relationships, what Discourses are relevant (and irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

#### Building politics

16. What social goods (e.g. status, power, aspects of gender, race and class, or more narrowly defined social networks and identities) are relevant (and irrelevant) in this situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?
17. How are these social goods connected to the Discourse models and Discourses operative in this situation?

#### Building connections

18. What sorts of connections –looking backward and/or forward-are made within and across utterances and large stretches of the interaction?
19. What sorts of connections are made to previous or future interactions, to other people, ideas, texts, things, institutions, and Discourses outside the current situation?
20. How is intertextuality (quoting or alluding to other texts) used to create connections among the current situation and other ones or among different Discourses?
21. How do connections of the sort in 18, 19, and 20 help (together with situated meanings and Discourse models) to constitute “coherence” –and what sort of “coherence” in the situation?

## Building significance for sign systems and knowledge

22. What sign systems are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation (e.g. speech, writing, images, and gestures)? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?
23. What systems of knowledge and ways of knowing are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant) and in what ways?
24. What languages in the sense of “national” languages like English, Russian, or Hausa, are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation?
25. What social languages are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant) and in what ways?
26. How is quoting or alluding to other oral or written texts (intertextuality) used to engage with the issues covered in questions 22-25?

The first building task designated by Gee concerns significance. In carrying out this analytical task, the researcher looks at how and what different things mean, specifically looking at situated meanings, discourse models, and intertextuality. For Gee, the term “situated meaning” indicates that “words have different meanings in different contexts of use” (53). He also uses the term “discourse model” to help explain why words have different situated meanings (Gee 61). Gee defines the discourse models, as “theories” (storylines, images, explanatory frameworks) “that people hold, often unconsciously, and used to make sense of the world and their experiences in it” (61). Gee asks, “How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not, and in what ways?” (11).

The second and third building tasks concern activities and identities. Gee believes that we use language to build an activity and an identity (11). The fourth building task investigates how

the speaker/writer uses language to build social relationships, and the fifth how the speaker/writer uses language to “convey a perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods, that is, to build a perspective on social goods” (Gee 12). The writer or speaker will show through his/her use of language what constitutes status, prestige, and power. The sixth building task involves showing how things are connected or relevant or to show how things are not relevant, and how sign systems and knowledge make one sign system or one form of knowledge relevant or privileged or not relevant or not privileged in a certain situation (Gee 13). Speakers/writers might choose to use English as their chosen sign system, or writing as relevant in a particular situation.

### **Sermons as Discourse**

Research supports the observation that preachers who are women face resistance to their being in the pulpit from some people in congregations and from male colleagues. Those people who oppose women preachers don't recognize the women as a part of this traditionally male-dominated profession. Gee believes that the key to Discourse is recognition. He states, “If you put language, action, interaction, values, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others *recognize* you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity), here-and-now, then you have pulled off a Discourse...If it is not recognizable, then you are not ‘in’ the Discourse” (Gee 27). As long as someone recognizes the Discourse as that of a preacher, then the Discourse is valid—male or female—even if it is different enough from what has gone before, but still recognizable, it can simultaneously change and transform Discourses (Gee 27).



In this study, I draw from Gee's method of discourse analysis to look for patterns and meanings within and across the texts of the sermons. The answers to Gee's 26 questions about the seven building tasks using his six tools of inquiry help identify patterns within these sermon narratives that illustrate how these women preachers build significance, identities, activities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. Each of the sermons in this study builds a situation using language.

### **The Data**

(A detailed discourse analysis is found in Appendix B of this dissertation study). The six women preachers in this study use their language to build significance for certain words with situated meanings in these sermons, to build identities for themselves and for people referenced in their sermons, to build the activity of preaching the sermon and also to depict the action(s) contained within their sermon stories, to build relationships—with the audience and with other people and texts, and between people in their sermons, to build politics by giving people, ideas, texts, places and things status or power, to build connections between what has gone before to the present and even to the future, and connections between texts, people and things, and to build sign systems and knowledge. In summary, these women use their language to construct their sermons in the way they choose to create the reality they construct. A different preacher could use language to create a different sermon based on the same theme or Bible text. Gee argues that we use the seven building tasks to use language to construct situations in certain ways and not in others. These seven building tasks are carried out at once and all together.

The first building task is building significance (see Table 2). Most of the words that have significance in these sermons are biblical names and terms which serve to attach situated

meaning and value to the institution of religion. For example, Shaw, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century preacher, uses the word “Egypt.” Outside of her sermon, that word denotes a country. Within the language of her sermon, that word takes on a specific situated meaning for those readers or listeners who have read the Bible and who attend church services. Shaw also uses secular names such as “Lucan the Roman poet” and “Dr. Doddridge,” who was a Congregational minister who also wrote hymns. Shaw assumes her audience would recognize these names and gives them significance by including them in her sermon. In turn, these words give her sermon significance because they are recognizable to the reader/listener, and they help clarify her points, and they add credibility as outside texts.

**Table 2: Summary of Building Task #1, Building Significance**

	Shaw	Mott	Frazier	Hogan	Hannan	Neely
Significance:						
Biblical terms	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Secular terms	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intertextuality:						
Oral texts	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Written texts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Discourse models:						
Secular	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sacred	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Discourse:						
Preaching/sermon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Church/Bible/Religion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Secular	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Lucretia Mott, a Quaker preacher from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also uses both biblical and secular terms. For example, she uses the terms “creed,” “high apostolic authority,” and “Corinth” to refer to Biblical references. She also uses terms like “objectors,” “sisters,” and “frivolous appendage” when referring to the fact that some people still object to women in the public sphere and to the idea of women preaching from the pulpit. Mott is the preacher who really moves beyond just preaching on the scripture and also heavily emphasizes relevant social issues of the day. She argues against the popular belief that Paul’s words in his letter to the Corinthians dictate that women be excluded from church leadership positions, including preaching. The words she uses take on situated meanings because of the context of the sermon and because of the Biblical text.

The four contemporary women preachers also give certain words and terms significance. For example, the Reverend Frazier, Minister to Children and Families at Memorial Baptist Church, gives significance to Biblical terms: she uses “Prodigal Son” to refer to the son in the Bible story who left home but was welcomed back with open arms by his father. She also uses the name “Mary” to refer to the mother of Jesus, and “Lamb of God,” “Prince of Peace,” and “stable in Bethlehem.” Frazier addresses the congregation as “Brothers and Sisters” and she also uses the word “friends” to refer to those people listening to her sermon. She uses masculine language such as “He” and “His” to refer to God. She also refers to “God the Father.” Frazier elects to use traditional liturgical language rather than to break new ground by using a feminine pronoun for God, or by saying, “God the Mother.”

The Reverend Hogan, professor of preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., also uses Biblical terms. For example, she uses the name “Mark” as a reference to the Gospel of Mark in the Bible. She also uses the terms “singing angels,” “the adoring Kings bearing gifts,” “manger,” “stable,” and “mother” to refer to the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. For secular terms, she uses the word “we” to include the congregation (reader/listener) in her sermon. In one sermon, Hogan gives significance to the word “nobody” which she uses thirty one times in her sermon. She uses the term “Matters of Life and Death” eleven times in her sermon to give significance to the story in the Gospel of Mark. The word “grandson” becomes significant as it relates to the sermon story, and Hogan gives significance to two local restaurants as they relate to her sermon.

The Reverend Hannan, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, follows a similar pattern in her sermons and gives many words significance because of their religious connotation. For example, she uses the term “disciples” to refer to the inner circle of Jesus and the term “inner circle” to refer to the Disciples of Christ. “Judas” is used to refer to the man who betrayed Jesus, and “Jesus” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Similar to Frazier, Hannan addresses the congregation as “Brothers and Sisters.” Other terms include “seminary” to refer to a college for religious studies, and “Lutheran Church” refers to a denomination of the Christian faith.

The Reverend Dr. Neely, pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Kinston, North Carolina, also uses her sermon language to attach situated meanings to times, places, bodies, and people in both sermons. The assumption is made by the preacher that the reader/listener is familiar with these terms because very few definitions or explanations of terms are provided. It is understood that the preacher is cognizant of her audience and is using words that they will understand. For

example, the word “Advent” is used to refer to the season in the church that precedes Christmas. “Lighting candles” refers to the Christian tradition of lighting one candle in the church each Sunday during Advent. The term “Lent” is used to refer to the season in the church before Easter, lasting forty days. Neely also uses secular terms such as “Interstate 95,” “Will Rogers,” and “med-o-vac helicopter.”

One aspect of Gee’s idea of building significance is intertextuality. Each preacher employs this concept by quoting or alluding to other oral and/or written texts. These other texts are given value because of their use in the sermon. For example, Shaw quotes from three Bible scriptures, a poem written by a male poet, and a hymn written by a Congregationalist minister. In both of her sermons, Frazier utilizes a personal story to illustrate the point of her sermon. She also references two books, Bible scripture, and the movie *Apollo 13*.

The Reverend Hogan quotes from a book written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and from an article in *The Washington Post*. She also quotes four Bible scriptures: Psalms, Samuel, Luke and Mark. The Reverend Hannan uses both oral and written texts in her sermons. For example, she quotes the students in her preaching class and a professor at her seminary. She also quotes Jesus’ words from the Bible and she refers to Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians and to a story from her childhood. The Reverend Neely’s language also gives situated meaning to other texts that she quotes in her sermon. For example, she alludes to the hymns “Silent Night” and “Joy to the World.” She also uses a story from a book which becomes central to her sermon. Neely also reads from the Book of Jonah, alludes to the words of the president of the Presbyterian seminary in Pittsburgh, quotes the hospital chaplain, uses part of a poem, and quotes from the old Testament. The use of these texts helps to illustrate the points being made in each sermon.

The final part of building significance involves discourse models and discourses. Gee looks at what “discourse models seem to be at play in connecting and integrating these situated meanings together?” (111). In Shaw’s sermons, the Discourse models all rely on the reader/listener’s understanding of Christianity. The preacher assumes that the people reading or listening to this sermon understand the premises of Christianity or they would not understand the situated meanings Shaw uses. For example, Shaw uses the concept that Christ died and rose again, the concept of eternal life, the concept of sinning and repenting, and the concept of faith. For Shaw’s sermon to be effective, the listener/reader must understand the situated meanings of the words she uses and the discourse models that connect the situated meanings.

Lucretia Mott alludes to both secular and sacred concepts for her Discourse models. For example, Mott uses her situated meanings and the Discourse models that connect them to create a sermon Discourse that challenges the institution of the church and its ban on women preaching. She also utilizes her sermon Discourse to challenge the church’s patriarchal Discourse. Her sermon Discourse is an attempt to transform the Discourse of society, the Discourse of the Bible, the Discourse of religion, and the Discourse of the institution of the church.

Like Mott, Frazier also uses both sacred and secular Discourse models to connect and integrate the situated meanings to each other. For example, she uses the story of the Prodigal Son, weddings, prayers, miracles, and the movement in society to look younger than your actual age. The Discourse of the preacher was being produced as she wrote and preached the sermon, and Frazier’s Discourse was being stabilized by her own writing and interpretation, and by the stories she uses and the texts she quoted. The Discourse of religion is also being stabilized because the sermon is based on Bible scripture. The Discourse of religious people and the expectations they have is being transformed as the preacher explains the meaning of the Gospel.

Also present in this sermon are the Discourse of belief, the Discourse of shame, and the Discourse of expectations from both society and from individuals.

The Reverend Lucy Hogan includes both sacred and secular Discourse models as well. For example, she uses the discourse models of attending church and reading the Bible. To understand the situated meanings in Hogan's sermon, the reader/listener must be familiar with the stories in the Bible. There is also the Discourse model of parenting. These Discourse models connect the situated meanings in Hogan's sermon and stabilize the Discourse of preaching. The Discourse of hope and the Discourse of the health care debate are transformed through Hogan's inclusion in her sermon. This reference connects that debate to the Bible text and to the theme of Hogan's sermon. The institution of the church is also being stabilized. The Discourse of preaching is re-produced with the words about the Gospel of the day. Also present is the Discourse of Jesus as the teacher. The Discourse of a "nobody" is transformed into the Discourse of a "somebody" through Hogan's explanation of the Gospel and through the action of the widow.

The Reverend Hannan uses both secular and sacred Discourse models to connect the situated meanings used in this sermon. For example, the institution of religion and the institution of the church are being reproduced, the Discourse of religion and the Discourse of the sermon are being stabilized, and the Discourse of the Bible being transformed into a lesson for all learners. Hannan also uses the Discourse model of the professor's story. The Discourses relevant in Hannan's sermon include the Discourse of the Apostle Paul, the Discourse of the Bible, the Discourse of religion, and the Discourse of the preacher which is stabilized as the sermon unfolds.

Like the others, the Reverend Neely also uses both sacred and secular Discourse models. For example, she uses the Discourse models of Advent and Lent, the Discourse model of familiar church hymns, the Discourse model of the story of the birth of Jesus, and the concept of baptism. The Discourse of preaching is being produced in this situation, and it is stabilized through the writing of the sermon. The Discourse of religion is being reproduced in this sermon. The Discourse of the unmarried teen with a child bringing shame to a parent is transformed into acceptance, and the Discourse of baptism is being stabilized through the sermon story. The Discourse of the story of Jonah is being reproduced through Neely's interpretation and explanation. The story is stabilized as the congregation is reminded about what took place. The preacher uses the Discourse of the Holocaust and transforms it to relate to the story of Jonah. The Discourse of the sermon is stabilized through the writing of the sermon. The Discourse of prayer is stabilized in the sermon, as is the institution of religion/church.

For building task 2, the overall activity being enacted in all ten sermons is the actual preaching of the sermon (see Table 3). Each of the preachers uses her language to get the readers/listeners to recognize that they are preachers. As Gee states, "We use language to get recognized as engaging in a certain sort of activity, that is, to build an activity here and now...When I act I have to use language to make clear to others what it is I take myself to be doing" (11). Within the activity of preaching, the actions evident in these sermons come from the stories, examples, narratives, scriptures, quotations, and the preachers' words contained within each sermon. Each preacher uses sub-activities of utilizing other texts within their sermons.

For example, Shaw describes the actions of the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness and complaining to Moses, and God's reactions to their complaining. She describes the effects of the serpents' bites, the effect of evil on the human heart, and the man dreaming that he fell off a cliff



and was rescued by God. Mott also relates actions through the language of her sermon. For example, she references the words of Paul in his Letter to the Corinthians and the verses from Joel's text. Mott also talks about the woman's suffrage movement, slavery, and temperance, and she encourages her listeners to carry out God's righteous will.

**Table 3: Summary of Building Task #2, Building Activities**

	Shaw	Mott	Frazier	Hogan	Hannan	Neely
Activities:						
Preaching	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sub-activities:						
Using other texts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reflect personal struggle	No	No	No	No	No	No
Action:						
Within sermon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Involve congregation	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

In both of Frazier's sermons, the actions take place within the telling of the sermon. For example, Frazier includes two personal stories that recount actual events that happened in her life. She also includes the story of the Prodigal Son, action contained in a story by Elizabeth Gilbert, and the action that takes place within the miracle at the wedding of Cana.

Hogan primarily focuses on Bible text and the action contained within that text in her sermons. She then relates present day examples to the stories from the Bible. For example, she relates the story of Jesus healing the daughter of Jairus to a pastor friend who has been dealing

with life and death issues in her congregation. She relates the story of the widow donating her two mites to the Temple and Jesus using her generosity as an example when speaking to his Disciples to the actions people take to be famous. In her sermon, Hogan reminds the listener/reader that they come together to praise God and to thank God for healing. Her sermon language guides the thinking of the congregation and of the reader.

The Reverend Hannan differs from the previously discussed preachers because she asks the audience to take an action. For example, at the end of one sermon, she asks the congregation to repeat the Greek phrase “Agapate allellous” out loud. Other actions in her sermons are contained within Bible scripture, Hannan’s participation with her preaching class, and her retelling of a personal story. Neely also asks her congregation to take an action in one of her sermons. For example, she asks her congregation to pray with her, and then invites them to follow along in a pew Bible as she reads. Neely also relates a story from another text and weaves that action into her sermon, she relates a story from the Bible, and she relates a personal story.

For building task 3, each preacher uses the language of her sermon to enact her identity as a preacher (see Table 4). However, none of these women identifies herself as a woman who is also a preacher. None of these women identifies herself as a woman who is struggling to adapt to a traditionally male-oriented profession. However, each of these women uses the language of her sermon to show that she is knowledgeable about Bible scripture. Each of these women incorporates Gee’s idea of intertextuality as she alludes to or utilizes other oral or written texts within her sermon to help illustrate, clarify or explain the point she is making. In each of these sermons, the preacher also enacts or constructs the identities of people in the sermon.

For example, Shaw’s sermon reflects a “teaching” style, and her tone is almost scolding. She “teaches” her congregation about the Hebrews’ journey through the wilderness and their

doubt expressed to Moses. She also “teaches” her congregation about the creature called a serpent. She uses a large portion of a poem written by Lucan to help her explain the serpents. She then relates the story of the serpents to the idea of Christians and their faith. Shaw’s knowledge of Bible text helps establish her identity as the preacher. In her sermon, she also enacts the identity of other people. For example, Shaw alludes to the identity of Moses as the leader who has the ear of God. Lucan is shown to have the identity of a poet worthy to be quoted. Shaw’s words identify Jesus Christ as the savior but also as the punisher, and her words enact the identity of the man in the dream. Each of these identities is constructed through the discourse of Shaw’s sermon.

**Table 4: Summary of Building Task #3, Building Identities**

	Shaw	Mott	Frazier	Hogan	Hannan	Neely
Identity:						
As preacher	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self as a woman struggling	No	No	No	No	No	No
Constructs identity for other people	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Knowledge of Bible	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Role of storyteller	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Role of teacher	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal story	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Mott constructs her identity and position as a preacher in her sermon. For example, she shows that she has cultural knowledge of both Bible text and of the relevant social issues. She

builds the argument that women have played a significant role in the church throughout history. In addition, she transforms the role of women by projecting what will happen when women finally take their place in the public sphere. She counters the objections voiced by Paul in his Letter to the Corinthians, and uses the words of Joel to advance her argument that women belong in the pulpit. Mot also gives her listeners the identity of someone who can bring about change as she encourages them to get involved with reform.

Likewise, Frazier constructs her identity through her sermon. For example, she shows through her sermon that she is knowledgeable, credible, and authoritative about the Gospel. Frazier creates a role of teacher and interpreter as she relates the story of the Prodigal Son and then the miracle at the wedding at Cana. Through her telling of personal stories, she takes on the identity of storyteller. Frazier also gives identity to other people in her sermon. For example, she gives Jesus the role of problem solver and miracle worker, and Mary the identity of a trusting mother. Frazier's identity as a preacher is stabilized by her telling of stories, use of examples, reference to sources, and her explanation of the Gospel.

Hogan's identity of the preacher is stabilized in her sermon. For example, her identity is stabilized through her sermon narrative as she shows her cultural knowledge of the Bible—its text and stories, and her cultural knowledge of other issues present in society and in her congregation. Hogan also establishes the identity of the people she refers to in her sermon. For example, Jairus takes on the identity of a desperate father, the unnamed widow takes on the identity of a desperate “nobody,” and Mattie takes on the role of an inspiring child with a rare illness.

The Reverend Hannan's identity as a preacher is under construction in her sermons. For example, Hannan builds her credibility with her knowledge of Bible scripture and her insight

into the interpretation of that scripture. Hannan also builds credibility for her identity as a preacher with her reference to the students in her preaching class. Hannan gives her congregation the identity of members of the church and believers in the faith of Christianity.

The Reverend Neely also constructs her identity as a preacher through her sermon. For example, Neely illustrates her cultural knowledge of the Holocaust and her extensive knowledge of the Bible story of Jonah. In one sermon, she also establishes her identity as a hospital chaplain and her knowledge of hospital culture. Neely stabilizes Jonah's identity as a reluctant missionary, establishes the Ninevites as evil doers, and transforms the identity of the EMS workers, the volunteers and police officers as well as the fellow hospital chaplain and the congregation.

For building task 4, a primary relationship for all ten of the women preachers in this study is the relationship they have with their readers/listeners. In addition, there are other relationships present in each sermon (see Table 5).

For Shaw, the most interesting social relationship relevant in her sermon is her relationship to her readers/listeners. For example, Shaw uses her sermon to show that she understands the Scripture and can teach her listeners about its relevance. She spends a large portion of her sermon reminding her congregation about the complaining Hebrews in the wilderness and God's punishment of sending the serpents. Shaw builds two other relationships: one with the poet Lucan and one with Dr. Doddridge, Shaw was not yet ordained when she first preached this sermon, so she might use the references to the poem and to the hymn, both written by men, to enhance her authority as a preacher. Shaw's language is interesting: she uses the personal pronoun "I" only three times. She uses inclusive pronouns including "you," "we," "us," and "our." She does not refer to God as "she" or "her," but instead uses masculine pronouns.

Lucretia Mott’s relationship to her audience is one of power and authority. For example, she speaks knowledgeably about current issues and about the Bible text. Similarly to Shaw, Mott’s social language is quite formal, and she uses complex vocabulary words. She also uses lengthy paragraphs. She must have known or assumed that her audience was educated. The use of the personal pronoun “I” seems to help establish her authority on the subjects she covers in her sermon. However, her use of inclusive pronouns such as “we,” “us,” “you,” “our,” “ourselves,” and “my friends” indicates that she wants to have a relationship with her congregation. Mott even places herself in the position of scapegoat or punching bag for society when she explains that she would rather be ridiculed if she awakens men to the idea of women belonging in the public sphere.

**Table 5: Summary of Building Task #4, Building Relationships**

	Shaw	Mott	Frazier	Hogan	Hannan	Neely
Relationships under construction:						
With audience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
With others	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social language:						
Inclusive pronouns	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Formal language	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Informal language	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Reverend Frazier builds a relationship with her readers/listeners in part by addressing them as “friends” and “brothers and sisters in Christ.” Her use of inclusive pronouns “you,” “we,”

“us,” “our,” and “your” shows that Frazier wants to communicate with her reader/listener. She wants her message to be shared with her congregation. In one sermon, the congregation’s relationship with the preachers is transformed as they move from listeners/readers to brothers and sisters in Christ, then to friends and then-vicariously- into characters in the Bible story. Frazier uses other texts to help build her relationship with her congregation. Interestingly, Frazier uses the masculine pronouns “him, his, he and himself” to refer to God.

The Reverend Hogan also builds a social relationship with her listeners/readers through her sermon language. For example, it is clear that Hogan is the person with the knowledge that the congregation has come to hear. Hogan explains the Scripture in detail and relates them to her congregation. Two interesting relationships are established when Hogan mentions that her husband is a doctor as she talks about the relationship to the health care debate, and when she mentions that she is a new grandmother which gives her credibility with any other grandmothers in the congregation. Hogan also uses inclusive pronouns including “we,” “us,” “you,” and “our.” She also addresses her congregation as “dear friends.”

The Reverend Hannan builds a social relationship with her listeners through her sermon. For example, she establishes her relationship as a teacher of homiletics by mentioning the students in her preaching class. Perhaps, this indicates the credible relationship as preacher that she is trying to have with the congregation. Hannan also references her relationship as a student in seminary when she talks about her preaching professor. Hannan uses inclusive pronouns such as “us,” “we,” “our,” “you,” and “ourselves” to show the relationship she wants to have with her congregation. Hannan also establishes her social relationship in one sermon when she asks the congregation to repeat a Greek phrase out loud six times.

The Reverend Neely uses her sermon language to demonstrate the relationship that she would like to have with her listeners. For example, she asks them to pray with her to get ready for the sermon. In this way, she includes her congregation from the beginning. It gives them something to do together, rather than just the preacher saying a prayer. Neely also shows the relationship she wants to have with her audience through her use of personal pronouns which include “you,” “we,” “us,” and “our.” Neely also demonstrates her relationship as hospital chaplain and storyteller as she recounts the story from another text. Finally, Neely shows other relationships as she recounts the story of Jonah to show her congregation the relevance of the church season of Lent.

**Table 6: Summary of Building Task # 5, Building Politics**

	Shaw	Mott	Frazier	Hogan	Hannan	Neely
Social goods:						
Knowledge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender (self)	No	No	No	No	No	No

One assumption might be that these women preachers would make their own gender a part of their sermon to somehow illustrate that they were women who had triumphed in the struggle for access to the pulpit. However, the women preachers in this study did not highlight their own gender in these sermons. Instead, they used their own knowledge and training to write sermons that allowed them status and power while making their own gender irrelevant.

For example, Anna Howard Shaw was not yet ordained when she preached her sermon, and Lucretia Mott was never ordained. Both were preaching at the height of the woman’s rights



movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Shaw preached her sermon as part of her preparation toward earning her license to preach (Farmer & Hunter 22). The primary social good involved is Shaw's extensive knowledge of the scripture and its interpretation. She also uses outside sources that were written by men. Perhaps these are used by Mott as a social good to gain status or credibility.

Lucretia Mott uses gender as a social good in her sermon, but not for herself. For example, she addresses the popular argument that Paul admonishes women to be silent in the church. Mott talks about the right of women to be in the public sphere and in the pulpit. Her primary social good is her knowledge of the Bible and of the important cultural issues of her time. As a woman, she will benefit from reform with regard to women's rights. However, in this sermon, her gender becomes secondary to her plea for reform in the areas of suffrage, slavery and temperance. Mott does show Paul's status in this sermon because his words have had the power to silence women in the church for centuries.

For the Reverend Frazier, age becomes a social good. For example, she relates a personal story about her own age being mistaken and someone assuming that she was actually younger than her age. Age is also used as a social good in the story of the Prodigal Son. Gender is not used as a social good for the preacher in her sermons, but gender is relevant because the central characters in the sermons are male. For example, in one sermon, Jesus has the power of creating a miracle when he turned water into wine at the wedding of Cana. In the story of the Prodigal Son, each character is male. Women play no part in this story. Frazier also gives the listener a chance to attain social goods: she lets the congregation know that if they believe God's statement, then they have a commitment to God. If not, they are still searching for that commitment.

The Reverend Hogan does not use her gender as a social good. She does, however, mention that her husband is a doctor, and this reference is used to gain status: she makes a reference to the health care debate in relation to a point in her sermon. She has more status making reference to the discourse model of health care as the wife of a doctor than she would as a lay person. Another example of gender becoming a social good is when Hogan identifies her best friend—a pastor—as “she.” Her friend gains status as a counselor and a pastor who is dealing with tough matters of life and death. The fact that she is a woman might give her an edge. One of her sermons focuses on three women who seem to have no power but actually are essential to the Bible story and to this sermon. The three women central to the Bible story and to this sermon make gender a social good.

The Reverend Hannan follows the pattern of the other women preachers in this study and does not use her own gender as a social good in either of her two sermons. She does, however, use her position as a professor of preaching as a social good in one sermon. For example, her mention of the students in her preaching class gives her status. Hannan also uses her knowledge of the Greek phrase “Agapate allelous” to gain status as a teacher in the sermon. She also references her seminary professor, so Hannan gains status as a student who has gained knowledge. Hannan also shows that Jesus has power as a teacher and a rabbi, and the disciples have power because they are part of Jesus’ inner circle.

The Reverend Neely does use gender as a social good, but she does not use her own gender to gain status. In one of her sermons, Neely uses a story written by a male author, and in the story, the pastor of the fictional church is male. The church elder is male as are both of the babies who are baptized. The women in the story are first depicted as subservient to the men in the story, but later come to have power as the mother and grandmother of the baby who brought

the congregation together in baptism. In a second sermon, Neely’s knowledge becomes a social good. She has knowledge of Bible scripture and the story of Jonah, the Holocaust, and the helicopter landing pad in the back of her former house. Neely makes reference to two outside sources, both male, which are used as social goods. Her story about the medical helicopter landing in the backyard of a former house gives her status.

For building task 6, in each of these sermons the preacher makes connections between present time and the time depicted in the Bible scripture (see Table 7). Each preacher also utilizes Gee’s concept of intertextuality, quoting or alluding to other spoken or written texts. These spoken or written texts help the preacher connect the ideas in their sermons to the Bible scripture and to their audience.

**Table 7: Summary of Building Task #6, Building Connections**

	Shaw	Mott	Frazier	Hogan	Hannan	Neely
Connections:						
Between past and present	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intertextuality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

For example, 19<sup>th</sup>-century preacher Anna Howard Shaw connects past, present and future with her reference to the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness, the relevance of the scripture in the lives of the congregation, and her admonition to the listener/reader to look to the future of the world and eternal life with God. Within her sermon, she also draws other connections and draws on two other texts. All of these connections contribute to the coherence of the Discourse of the sermon. Shaw utilizes the situated meanings within her sermon, the activity of preaching her

sermons, the identity she enacts as a preacher, the social goods she creates with her language, and the relationships she builds with her language to create the narrative of her sermon Discourse.

Nineteenth-century preacher Lucretia Mott also makes a connection between the past—Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians in the Bible—to the present (her sermon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) to her hope for the future with regard to reform on the issues of suffrage, slavery and temperance. She, similar to Shaw, makes connections to other texts as she connects her sermon Discourse to the Discourses at issue in society, and all of these work together to give Mott’s sermon coherence.

The Reverend Frazier specifically uses a personal story in each of her sermons in this study to show a connection between herself, her sermon, and the lesson she is teaching. The stories connect her past and her present. Her sermons are coherent because of the situated meanings, discourse models and the connections she makes as she weaves her narrative.

Hogan also makes a connection between the Bible text and her present day sermon. For example, the connections she makes with regard to people and places in her sermon and to other texts all aid in helping to create coherence between the situated meanings and Discourse models to give her sermons the coherence necessary in a narrative. Within the Discourse of these sermons, the situated meanings take on certain significance, the identities and activities are enacted, the relationships are made, the social goods are distributed.

The Reverends Hannan and Neely also make many connections in their sermons. For example, in one sermon, Hannan uses a technique that Frazier also uses—telling a personal story that connects Hannan’s past to her present. She also uses other texts to help add coherence to her sermon. Neely does the same with stories, poems and quotations. She, too, connects her past to

the present with her story of the medical helicopter landing in the backyard of her former house. Her other personal story about being a chaplain in the hospital connects a past experience as well. She also uses other texts to help create her sermon. The situated meanings and Discourse models in all of these sermons are used to create a coherent narrative that preaches on the Bible text in a coherent sermon.

The relevant sign system in each of these sermons is writing (see Table 8). The sermons, while written to be delivered orally, begin as written text. The preachers all allude to or quote other written texts as well. English is the “national” language relevant in each sermon.

The Reverend Shaw and Lucretia Mott use a very formal style in their writing, and Lucretia Mott uses the most formal social language. For example, Shaw and Mott use lengthy sentences and paragraphs and complex vocabulary words.

**Table 8: Summary of Building Task #7, Building Significance for Sign Systems and Knowledge**

	Shaw	Mott	Frazier	Hogan	Hannan	Neely
Sign Systems:						
Writing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
National language-English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intertextuality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

In Frazier’s sermons, writing is the most relevant sign system. Here, Frazier does quote the words of her father and of the waitress, God’s voice, complaints from the oldest son, Mary, Jesus, and the head steward, but writing remains dominant. Her social language is organized but

informal. Frazier uses paragraphs in prose style. Some of the paragraphs are lengthy but many are only three lines long.

In Hogan's sermon "Matters of Life and Death," Jesus' words to the little girl who is dead are in Aramaic, but Hogan translates them into English. Hogan writes both of her sermons in short stanzas instead of lengthy paragraphs. Sometimes, she alternates between three-line stanzas and two-line stanzas. In addition, she utilizes dashes, ellipses, and parentheses. She also uses simple vocabulary words. While the listener can't see the grammatical devices, the verbal sermon might reflect this informal, more conversational style of writing.

In the Reverend Hannan's sermons, writing is the relevant sign system, although Hannan also incorporates the spoken word. For example, she uses the words of her students, the verbal words of Jesus, the words of Peter, words of the naysayers and words of the congregation. English is the national language although Hannan does translate a phrase from the Greek into English. Hannan's social language is informal. Her sermon is written in prose style using a variety of paragraph lengths. In the sermons analyzed for this study, the preacher sent the typed manuscript with her handwritten notes and corrections. These notes and changes make the sermon more interesting because the preacher's original and amended thoughts are evident. Hannan's social language is informal, and she uses a variety of paragraph lengths.

The Reverend Neely also makes writing the relevant sign system. Her sermons also use English as the national language, although Neely does make a reference to the Hebrew word for sailors and the word for Jonah. Neely's sermons are formally organized with clear introductions, bodies and conclusions. Neely's sermons are the most formally organized: she labels the introduction and conclusion and uses Roman numerals for the main points in the body of her sermons. Paragraphs are short, and vocabulary is simple.

Each of these preachers alludes to or quotes other people or texts. All of these contribute to the relevant sign system of writing and to the national language of English. These preachers weave their sermons with their own knowledge of Bible scripture, knowledge of relevant issues of their times, examples, and outside sources to create a narrative that emphasizes the lesson they want to teach.

## **Discussion**

Gee's theory of discourse analysis, used to analyze the ten sermons in this study, provides detailed data illustrating how each woman preacher uses sermon language to create her own Discourse. Each of these sermons is an example of language in action: language is used to create an interpretation of scripture, and language is used to create meaning for the reader/listener. Utilizing Gee's twenty-six questions, grouped into seven building tasks, allows the analyst to understand from the text the ways in which the writer of each sermon builds meaning through her sermon.

Evident from the data is the observation that all six women preachers build significance for both biblical and secular terms. The use of biblical terms serves to attach situated meaning and value to the institution of religion. All six women also use secular terms to build significance. These terms include names, places, personal pronouns, and common nouns. The choice of specific biblical and secular terms by each preacher helps to create her intended meaning in the sermon.

Each preacher also utilizes Gee's concept of intertextuality. All six preachers quote from or allude to outside written texts, while only Frazier, Hannan, and Neely allude to or quote oral

texts. These other texts are given value by their use in the sermons, and each text used helps to clarify or to illustrate a point being made in the sermon.

Within the task of building significance, discourse models are used to connect the situated meanings in a text. All of the preachers make use of sacred discourse models such as Christianity, Bible text, and seasons in the church including Advent and Lent. Five of the six women also make use of secular discourse models, including parenting, health care, and women's rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Each of the preachers uses the situated meanings they have created and the discourse models which connect those meaning to create their sermon discourse. Each preacher also uses discourses of the church, the Bible, and religion. Four of the preachers utilize sacred discourses, while Shaw and Hannan utilize secular discourses.

For the second building task, building activities, the overall activity enacted in all ten sermons is the preaching of the sermon. With regard to sub-activities, all six preachers utilize other texts within their sermons. None of the preachers uses their sermon to reflect a personal struggle on their road to being allowed to preach or to become ordained. For all six women, action takes place within the sermon, while only Hannan and Neely actually involve their congregation in an action.

The third building task involves building identities. None of the preachers uses her sermon language to identify herself as a woman who is also a preacher, but all of these women enact their identity as a preacher through their sermon language. The preachers also enact or construct the identities of other people in the sermons.

Building task number four examines how language is used to build relationships. Each preacher's relationship with her audience and with other people is under construction. Each



preacher uses inclusive pronouns to establish her relationship with her congregation. Shaw and Mott use formal language while Frazier, Hogan, Hannan and Neely use informal language.

For the fifth building task, building politics, each preacher uses her language to write a sermon that allows her power and status because of the knowledge she has about the Bible text. None of these preachers use their own gender as a social good. Instead, each chooses to focus on the text for the day.

In the sixth building task, each preacher makes a connection between the past and the present, and each uses intertextuality to help connect the ideas in their sermons to the Bible text and to their audience. For building task number seven, building significance for sign systems and knowledge, each preacher makes writing the relevant sign system. Each also makes English the relevant language.

Even though this study examines sermons written by women who lived and preached in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and sermons written by women living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the use of Gee's theory of discourse analysis reveals that these sermons contain similar patterns. While stylistically, Shaw and Mott use more formal language than do Frazier, Hogan, Hannan, and Neely, they all utilize personal pronouns to create a relationship with their reader/listener. Shaw uses her sermon language the most forcefully to argue about a relevant social issue—women's rights in the public sphere—but Frazier, Hogan and Neely also make references to social issues including cosmetic surgery, weddings, health care, celebrity status, emergency medicine, and the Holocaust.

Other similarities uncovered include quoting or alluding to outside texts to add meaning or clarity to the sermons, utilizing recognizable discourse models to connect situated meanings, and creating and stabilizing the discourse of preaching. While Mott's sermon reflects the struggle of women to gain equal rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no personal struggle is mentioned. None of the

contemporary women reference any obstacles they have encountered in their quest to preach.

Each woman constructs her identity as a preacher through her sermon, but no preacher constructs her identity as a woman through her sermon. All of the preachers make English their relevant language and writing the relevant sign system.

Gee's twenty-six questions allow the analyst to detect that each woman preacher in this study uses language to build significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. Although each of these sermons is different, each sermon reflects Gee's concept of reflexivity as the preachers use their language to fit the situation in which they are communicating, while at the same time, their language is creating the situation. The sermons clearly represent Gee's belief that language is worth studying only if it is in practice. These sermons are examples of women preachers creating their own discourse.

## CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

### **Introduction**

Even though women have been a part of church history and tradition, leadership roles have been contested. Women have faced fierce opposition from male colleagues, church hierarchies, and even congregations. But women have persisted in their desire to preach, and today, women are attending seminaries in record numbers. Nevertheless, despite some gains, the path to the pulpit remains rocky for many women.

While the struggle of women preachers to be ordained, to receive a call from a church, to be taken seriously, or even to be seen as equal to men is not the primary focus of this study, it is important to recognize that struggle and to wonder how it might be reflected in the lives and work of women preachers. It is not unreasonable to expect that women preachers would use their pulpit time to illuminate their struggle to gain access to the pulpit. Therein lies the rationale for this study. What better place to begin than by examining the sermons of women preachers? These sermons are the narratives of the six preachers involved in this study. The data from this case study demonstrates particular things about particular sermons written by particular women. This anecdotal evidence does not lead to general conclusions about women or women preachers. It only reflects what has been found in the ten sermons written by the six women preachers in this case study.

### **Summary of Narrative Analysis**

The data from the narrative analysis reveals that each of the ten sermons in this case study reflects the Labovian theory of narrative structure. Each of the elements—abstract, orientation, action, evaluation, resolution, and coda—serves a purpose in these carefully

constructed texts. Labov and Waletzky's pivotal study of narrative analysis concentrates primarily on the componential approach, or the basic structure of the narrative, and it allows the reader to see the different functions of the specific elements. For example, in the sermons in this study, each preacher uses an orientation to set the scene for the sermon, identifying the location, the people, and the time. The action, while mostly contained within the sermon, allows the congregation to witness the story moving forward, and the evaluations help clarify the lesson in the Bible text. The resolution is used to bring the sermon narrative to a close, and the coda, if used, returns the reader/listener to the present. As evidenced from the narrative analysis in this study, while a 'canonical' narrative will contain all six elements designated by Labov, actual narratives may or may not contain all of them and may or may not follow the exact order Labov describes. Clearly, these sermons are not just stories women tell when they get into the pulpit. Instead, these sermons are tightly structured; therefore, the sermons become the data, offering clues about the women preachers.

Each of the ten sermons is unique. Although each sermon can be classified as a narrative, none of the sermons is structured exactly the same way. Each of the women preachers chooses to use the narrative elements in her own way. For example, in some cases, the preacher begins with a personal story, using it to frame the sermon, and in other cases, the preacher chooses to embed a story within the sermon narrative. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century preachers utilize lengthy evaluations, using the majority of their sermons to "teach" the congregations. These lengthy evaluations fit Labov's theory of narrative because he writes that the evaluation is perhaps the most important element of the narrative in addition to the basic narrative clause (Labov 231). The evaluation of the narrative is the means by which the narrator (preacher) indicates to the congregation the point of the narrative--why it was told and what the narrator was getting at (Labov 231).

The women preachers in this study found the evaluation to be important: all six women included an evaluation in their sermon, and Frazier, Hogan, and Hannan included more than one. For Labov, the coda is not always necessary because it is the only element that does not answer pivotal questions about the narrative. Therefore, it is not found in all narratives. In this study, Shaw and Mott chose not to utilize a coda in either of their sermons. Hogan chooses not to use a coda in Sermon 5, but she does use a coda in Sermon 6. Both Shaw and Mott use more formal language as well which might reflect the expectations of the congregation, or it could be the preachers' method of establishing their credibility.

### **Summary of Discourse Analysis**

The data from the discourse analysis reveals that each preacher in this study uses her language to build significance for words, people, places and things. Each preacher has used her language to enact activities and identities, and to build relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems or ways of knowing. My expectation was that the analysis would find patterns in the language of each sermon that call attention to the gender of the preacher, or to the struggles of the preacher, or to the fact that the preacher was charting new territory in an occupation that has been dominated by men. By making themselves and their struggles front and center in each sermon, these women would finally develop their own preaching styles. Instead, these women all developed their preaching styles, but that style has nothing to do with detailing their struggles or highlighting their gender. These women have constructed their own sermon discourse, and they preach not like women, but like the preachers that they are.

This study focuses on the text or written language of the sermon. Gee's theory of language addresses how language gets used "on site" to enact social activities and social

identities, and this is a discourse. However, as referenced in Chapter 3, for Gee, language is not enough. Also necessary are the body, clothes, gestures, actions, interactions, symbols, tools, technologies, values, beliefs, attitudes and emotions. Each of these preachers has written their sermons (discourses) and enacted their identities as preachers with their activity of preaching. However, to create the Discourse of their sermon, they also brought to the writing task all of the non-language “stuff” that Gee identifies. While the reader may not be able to physically see the preachers’ clothes, gestures, attitudes and appearance, the reader can see that through the sermon, these women have created a Discourse.

The six preachers in this study use their language to build significance for certain words with situated meanings, to build identities for themselves and for people referenced in their sermons, to build the activity of preaching the sermons and also to depict the action(s) contained within their sermon stories, to build relationships—with the audience and with other people and texts, and between people in their sermons, to build politics by giving people, ideas, texts, places and things status or power, to build connections between what has gone before to the present and even to the future, and connections between texts, people and things, and to build sign systems and knowledge. In summary, these women use their language to construct their sermons in the way they choose to create the reality they choose. A different preacher could use language to create a different sermon based on the same theme or Bible text.

Both the structure and content of discourse are important, which is the rationale for combining an analysis of the narrative structure of each sermon based on Labov’s theory with an analysis of both form and content based on Gee’s theory. As Gee argues, discourse analysis always involves moving from context to language and from language to context. When we analyze language or text, we get information about the context surrounding the language or text

and we use this information to form a hypothesis about what that piece of language means and is doing. We also study the language or text and ask ourselves what we can learn about the context in which the language was used and how that context was interpreted by the speaker/writer and reader/listener (Gee 14).

Gee states that validity is not shown by arguing that a discourse analysis reflects reality. “The analyst interprets his or her data in a certain way and those data so interpreted, in turn, render the analysis meaningful in certain ways and not in others” (Gee 113). Judith Baxter, author of “Discourse-Analytic Approaches to Text and Talk”, agrees with Gee’s concept: discourse analysis focuses on studying language in its own right, and its hallmark is its recognition of the variability in and the context dependence of participants’ discourse (Baxter 124). “Discourse analysis works from a hermeneutic, interpretive or social constructionist stance, which challenges the idea that there is a single ‘Archimedean point’ from which linguistic data can be analyzed neutrally and a single, reliable interpretation reached” (Baxter 126).

However, Gee argues that an analysis is not just the analyst’s opinion, although all discourse analyses are open to further discussion and dispute. Validity, for Gee, is based on four elements: convergence, agreement, coverage, and linguistic details (Gee 114). Gee contends that the answers to the twenty-six questions he provides for discourse analysis will not converge unless there is good reason to trust the analysis (114).

### **Strengths and Weakness of Frameworks Used**

One potential weakness of Labov’s theory of narrative structure is that it focuses primarily on the formal elements of a narrative. As Gimenez points out, this narrow view of

narratives fails to account for the larger sociolinguistic contexts in which the narrative takes place (206). Labov and Waletzky's approach examines narratives as isolated and self-contained units. While this approach has made invaluable contributions to the fields of linguistics, discourse studies, and genre studies, "it may not be sufficient to establish connections that can be made between groups of narratives or discourses produced in the same sociolinguistic context and the social patterns that frame and sustain them" (Gimenez 199). However, Labov has continued to refine and to develop his approach to narrative analysis. Almost all treatments of narrative analysis over the past 40 years cite Labov, even if they take a different approach to narrative than he does. For this study, Labov's work provides a starting point to analyzing the sermons of these six women preachers. Utilizing the elements of Labov's narrative structure allows the reader/listener of these sermons to observe how each preacher constructs her sermon to accomplish her purpose of communicating to her audience.

Gee's theory of discourse analysis is simply one approach to discourse analysis. In the introduction to his book *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, Gee explains that he expects the reader to transform or even abandon the tools he details and reinvent and combine their own versions (5). Gee supports the idea that different approaches fit different situations. One potential weakness of Gee's theory is that Gee provides twenty-six possible questions to ask about the seven building tasks, using the six tools of inquiry that he designates. Perhaps, the sheer number of tools involved might be intimidating to a potential analyst. Conversely, the strength of Gee's theory is its detail and thoroughness. With his tools, the analyst can feel confident that a detailed analysis has been completed.



## Observations of Sermons and Preachers

When Lucy Hogan was writing *Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching*, she asked a friend what he wanted new preachers to know. The friend told Hogan to tell new preachers that people are listening to what they have to say (Hogan xii). Hogan agrees. The other five women in this study agree also—they have written their sermons with the knowledge that people are listening to what they have to say. Hogan writes:

How do we both empty ourselves and at the same time write and preach sermons that honor the God who has suffered and died for us? How do we humble ourselves on the one hand and do our very best on the other? How can we be talented, creative, engaging preachers who keep the focus on God and the gospel, rather than on ourselves? (53).

Each of the women in this study must have similar thoughts because each woman made the focus of her sermon God and the gospel, not herself. While several of the women preachers use personal stories or a personal example as an illustration, the focus of their sermon remains on the Bible text.

Hogan addresses the question of whether or not preachers should talk about themselves or use personal examples in the pulpit. She explains that this has been a point of contention with homileticians. Some argue that sermons are “to be about God, not about you, and talking about yourself in the sermon only focuses attention in the wrong direction” (Hogan 145). She disagrees, however, and points to Paul to argue that “Christian preaching has, from the very beginning, been incarnational, made present in the flesh of the preacher” (Hogan 145). Hogan argues that the preacher may speak about themselves and their experiences, but that they should do so with care and thought and “with fear and trembling” (145). The bottom line is that Hogan believes that personal experiences should be controlled and if personal experience is used as a starting point for the sermon, it should then quickly turn to the congregation and place the focus on them and their experiences.

Thomas G. Long, a Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, is the author of *The Witness of Preaching*, one of the standard texts in preaching classes. He states that homileticians have debated the proper form for sermons, but that “a sermon’s form should grow out of the shape of the gospel being proclaimed as well as out of the listening patterns of those who will hear the sermon” (Long 134). However, Long believes that preachers should not look to culture to tell them what form the sermon should take, nor should they ignore culture while searching for a purified sermon form. He concludes that the “preacher must be concerned about the truth being preached, but always in light of how this congregation will be able to hear it. Likewise, the preacher must be concerned about how this congregation will listen, but always in relation to the hearing of this truth” (Long 136). The sermons in this analysis have combined these two concepts—they have been written based in Biblical text, but with a nod to how the congregation will hear them.

Contemporary women preachers take their roles seriously. They seem to value the fact that preaching is more than just a hard-earned right. They view preaching as interpreting God’s word and communicating that meaning to their congregations. Kathryn Schifferdecker, Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, states, “It’s just such a great privilege to preach. It’s such a great privilege to be the person preaching from the pulpit, preaching the Word of God every Sunday...But it’s also a great responsibility...” (www.workingpreacher.org).

The Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest recognized as one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English language by Baylor University, expresses her thoughts about preaching:

For me, to preach is first of all to immerse myself in the word of God, to look inside every sentence and underneath every phrase for the layers of meaning that have

accumulated there over the centuries. It is to examine my own life and the life of the congregation with the same care, hunting the connections between the word on the page and the word at work in the world. It is to find my own words for bringing those connections to life, so that others can experience them for themselves. When that happens—when the act of preaching becomes a source of revelation for me as well as for those who listen to me—then the good news every sermon proclaims is that the God who acted is the God who acts, and that the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the world (33).

Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were told that they were not suited for the public sphere and certainly not for the pulpit. When they did attempt to preach, they were thought to be unnatural, promiscuous, and even unsexed. They were laughed at, ridiculed, and criticized. They persisted because the call for them to preach was stronger than the opposition. That same persistence is visible with women preachers today. The four contemporary preachers in this study felt called to preach, and each has succeeded in becoming a preacher. They, too, were told in more subtle ways that they were not suited for the pulpit. The Reverend Frazier received thirty rejection letters from churches in Texas, telling her that she was not wanted.

The Reverend Hogan has her Masters of Divinity and her Doctor of Ministry and teaches homiletics, but she says that culture still plays a part in the acceptance of women as preachers. Hogan believes that women preachers are still fighting Paul's words that women shall keep silent in the church (May 2010). The Reverend Neely also has both her Masters of Divinity and her Doctor of Ministry, and yet after she "fired" herself from her last church to meet the payroll, she felt that she had aged out and gendered out and wasn't sure she would get another call (Neely: May 2010).

The Reverend Hannan doesn't focus on the obstacles she has faced. As a professor of preaching in Columbia, South Carolina, though, she says that she has male students who "push back" when they receive grades. She isn't sure that they would question their grade if their

professor were a man (May 2010). Hannan hasn't preached regularly in eight years, so she may be missing some of the obstacles the other women have faced.

What is obvious is that women preaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century face some of the same obstacles that faced those women preachers living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: some people wonder if women can be as good preachers as men; some people feel that women are not able to be good preachers; other people wonder if women preachers will preach "like women" as though that would be justification for keeping women away from the preaching task. In short, many women preachers still face stiff resistance to their admittance into the pulpit. That resistance comes from a variety of sources including church hierarchies, male colleagues, family and friends, and congregations. Women's credibility as preachers is questioned by those who think that only men can or should preach. What will it take for some members of the congregation and some members of the clergy to recognize women who are preachers as credible? What is it about a sermon that makes people nervous about women preaching? Perhaps it is the idea that preachers interpret God's words and that women might interject too much of themselves and cloud that message. Perhaps if women preachers don't follow the formula set by male preachers, they won't give the sermon message the same significance that a man can give to it. The sermons of women preachers then become significant objects of research interest so that these points can be either disputed or reinforced.

### **Limitations of Study**

This study has several limitations. First, I analyzed only the written sermons of women preachers. I used two sermons from women who preached in the nineteenth century because that was a pivotal time in the history of women gaining equal rights and being allowed to preach in

public. It was also the time of the first ordination of a woman preacher. I also use the sermons of four women who are preaching in the 21st century. I thought that this choice would reflect changes in the perception of society of women as preachers. I expected that the sermons would be completely different, but that the messages might be similar. For example, I thought the women's sermons from the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be less formal and reflect a less sophisticated preacher while the sermons from the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be more formal and reflect more sophistication. Because it was obviously impossible to actually watch the 19<sup>th</sup>-century women preach, I chose not to watch the contemporary preachers either.

A second limitation is that I don't compare these sermons to sermons written by male preachers. A comparison might provide clues as to different styles of preaching by gender, or might show that there are no differences. A future study might focus on the language in sermons written by women preachers, but also provide a contrast by including several sermons written by preachers who are men.

Third, my sample is small. I analyzed ten sermons; one each from Anna Howard Shaw and Lucretia Mott; and two each from Melissa Frazier, Lucy Hogan, Shauna Hannan and Wanda Neely. I chose the sermons based primarily on length. The second criterion I used was organization: the sermon must have a clear beginning, middle and end. Third, I tried to choose sermons based on different Bible scripture. Sermons written by women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were limited in number, so I chose the sermons I analyzed for this study. I asked the contemporary women to send sermons of their choosing. I didn't ask for sermons written on a particular biblical text or for a certain Sunday. I chose two from each of their contributions. I don't know that choosing different sermons would have altered my analysis, but studying other sermons

might reveal other results. In a future study, I might ask for a larger sample and coordinate sermon dates or sermon subjects.

### **Future Studies**

Because I concentrated my analysis on only the written sermons of women, a future study might be focused on both written sermons and the actual preaching of those sermons. While studying the written sermons of women preachers provides valuable insight into how these women create their own meaning and their own discourses, sermons are made to be preached out loud. Therefore, a future study of observing women preach might reveal meanings that were either missed or distorted through studying them only as written texts. Roxanne Mountford's book *The Gendered Pulpit; Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*, moves in this direction. Mountford observed three women preachers to observe how they adapted to the physical space of the traditionally male pulpit. What she found was that two of the women simply left the space of the pulpit and preached from the aisle in the church. The third chose to stay in the pulpit, but used other strategies to accommodate to the pulpit's masculine rhetorical space.

A future study might observe non-verbal language of women preachers as well as their vocal delivery and appearance. Women's sermons, as a genre, have been an under-investigated area for significant research studies. Studying the written text of women preachers fills one gap in the research, but adding the observational component will help bring American women preachers and their preaching styles to the forefront of historical and religious studies.

## Conclusion

Lucretia Mott has been described as a powerful and resolute force in nineteenth century reform by Dana Greene:

It was from her religious experience in the Society of Friends that she fashioned her critique of society and her vision of its restructuring. Her sermons and speeches contain the pieces of that religious world view and the application of her religious principles to the human reality she confronted in nineteenth century America. They stand as testimony to the power of religious insight in the creation of a humane society (3).

Anna Howard Shaw left the ministry to work full time for women's suffrage. She had a strong voice, and she felt called to use it. "She was such an effective speaker that she was soon nationally recognized. She preached the opening sermon at the Women's International Council of 1888 meeting in Washington, D.C., and she was president of the National American Women Suffrage Association from 1904-1915" (Farmer and Hunter 21). Both of these women obviously preached in a time when society was re-examining its views on the proper place for women.

The four contemporary preachers whose sermons I analyzed have not had to fight for the right to vote, or for the right to gain access to the public sphere. However, they have still chosen a profession that is male-dominated. When asked to characterize the progress of women in ordained ministry, Hogan stated that while progress is huge, women have a long way to go because the majority of churches don't ordain women. At clergy meetings there are a lot of women. Lots of women are heads of churches (May 2010). However, "In Memphis, there are no women who are rectors. There are pockets in the U.S. where there are more. The higher up you go in the Methodist Church, the fewer women you find. This mirrors the broader culture" (Hogan: May 2010). Many of her women preaching students have anxiety about claiming authority. They wonder what people will think about them. They talk about the attitudes of the congregation in class. Some of her students are right out of college. We ask, "Is the resistance

because you are a woman or because you are the pastor. Are they the same problems that men have?” (Hogan: May 4,2010).

The Reverend Neely explains that originally her vision was to “boldly go where no woman has ever gone before,” but she found out her vision was actually to “go where no man would go” (May 25, 2010). For Neely, the obstacles she faces as a preacher who is a woman don’t include her gender as much as they do her age.

Frazier states, “I love what I do. The best part of being a woman in the ministry is that doors open to wives, mothers, etc. People come to me [for counseling] who wouldn’t go to other people. I have a different perspective than the men. I see things differently” (May 7, 2010).

Hannan believes that “when you experience a sermon, something happens to you that is more important than what the sermon is about” (May 18, 2010). In her preaching classes, her students have certain assignments for sermons. The students are given a context to analyze and they have to decide how context affects the sermon. Hannan gives students the tools so that they can assess every situation. She also tells her students not to just go to what they did before when writing a sermon. Things have changed since the last time they preached on a certain text. Hannan argues that the context changes, the preacher changes, and God is working anew. Hannan does not prepare her students differently based on their gender. She instead looks at their level of education and their level of maturity. She says that “women tend to be deeper thinkers.” Women, in the classes she has taught, have a “stick-to-it-ness,” and an excitement about learning (May 18, 2010).

Each of the six women in this study was or is well qualified for her position as a preacher. They have each brought to the sermon their own viewpoint and a clear interpretation of what the Bible text is saying. They have removed their gender from the equation of a successful



sermon, and instead have focused their energies and their insights into creating a sermon that “speaks” to their reader/listener. Their chosen rhetorical strategies do not include making sure they use inclusive language every time they refer to God, or telling stories about their own struggles to become a preacher. Their rhetorical strategies instead include creating a coherent text that enacts their identities as preachers through their knowledge and activities, and also constructing significance for words, building relationships, distributing social goods, making connections, and valuing sign systems and knowledge. These women have each created a sermon discourse that focuses on the Bible text and its relevance to its audience.

Using Labov’s concept of the elements of narrative structure and Gee’s theory of discourse analysis, we see that the women preachers in this study chose to do their struggling to adapt to their male-oriented profession behind the scenes and to do their preaching in public. In this way, these women preachers truly claim their place in the public sphere and they truly claim their right to their distinct and discernible preaching style.

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## APPENDIX A: SERMONS

### **Sermon 1: The Reverend Anna Howard Shaw**

**Text: St. John III, 14, 15**

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:  
That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

All doubtless are familiar with the history of the Hebrews while in bondage in the land of Egypt, of their deliverance by Moses and their wanderings in the wilderness.\* The period in their wanderings to which the text refers is that immediately after their conquest of the Canaanites which resulted in the complete destruction of them and their cities, and during which the Hebrews had again resumed their wanderings and journeyed from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to compass the land of Edom. By the way of the Red Sea here does not mean that branch of the Red Sea over which they had already passed: but another branch lying [farther]\* east. The Hebrews became very much discouraged on account of the frequent disappointments, and delays on their way. They began to murmur and speak against the Lord and against Moses, saying

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\*Editor's Note: This sermon by the Reverend Anna Howard Shaw was probably first preached on September 30, 1877. This was the first sermon written by Shaw in order to get a license to preach from the presiding elder; it is a transcription of her handwritten manuscript, which is now a part of the Dillon Collection at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

\*Brackets throughout the historical section indicate the correct spelling of an originally misspelled word or the insertion of a word by the editor(s) for sense.

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“Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt—to die in the wilderness, for there is no bread here, neither is there any water, and our souls [loathe] this...light bread.” And the Lord sent fiery serpents among them; and they bit the people, and many of the people died. Therefore they came to Moses saying, “We have sinned for we have spoken against thee; pray unto the Lord that he take [away] the serpents from us.” And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, “Make thee a fiery serpent and put it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten when he looketh upon it shall live.” And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

It has been difficult to assign a name to the creature termed in the Hebrew: *nachash*. It has different signification, but its meaning here is most difficult to ascertain. *Seraphim* from the same root is one of the orders of angelic beings. As it is written in Isa. VI. 2.

But as it comes from the root, *saraph* which means “to burn, it has been translated “fiery” in the text.

It is likely that Saint Paul alludes to the seraphim in Hebrews 1:7. “Who maketh his angels spirits and his ministers a *flame of fire*.” The animals mentioned by Moses may have been called “fiery” because of the heat, violent [inflammation], and thirst occasioned by their bites. And if they were serpents (which still exist in that part of Arabia), they were of the prester, or dipsas, species whose bite, especially that of the former, occasions a violent [inflammation] through the whole body, and a fiery appearance of the countenance.

The poet Lucan has expressed the terrible effect of the bite of these serpents in the following manner.

Ahns a noble youth of Tyrrhen blood,  
Who bore the standard, on a dipsas trod;

Backward the wrathful serpent bent her head,  
And, fell with rage, the unheeded wrong repaid.  
Scarce did some little mark of hurt remain,  
And scarce he found some little sense of pain.  
Nor could he yet danger [doubt] nor fear  
That death with all its terrors threatened spread,  
And every nobler part at once invades;  
*Swift flames consume* the marrow and the brain,  
And the *scorched entrails* rage with burning pain;  
Upon his heart the thirsty poisons prey,  
And drain the sacred juice of life away.  
No kindly floods of moisture bathe his tongue,  
But cleaving to the parched roof it hung;  
No trickling drops distil, no dewey sweat,  
To ease his weary limbs, and cool the raging heat.

The effect of the bite of the prester, he describes in the manner.

A fate of different kind Naridius found,  
A burning prester gave the deadly wound;  
And *straight a sudden* flaim began to spread,  
And paint his visage with a glowing red.  
With swift expression swells the bloated skin,  
Naught but an undistinguished mass is seen  
While the fair human form lies lost within  
The puffy poison spreads and heaves around,  
Till all the *man* is in the *monster* drowned.

Other writers are of the opinion that the serpents were of the flying kind, and might have been called “fiery,” by the reason of their color. The season of the year in which the [Hebrews] were under this calamity was the season when these creatures were on the wing to visit the neighboring, and adjacent countries, and might have been directed into the [Hebrews’] camp.

That they were very numerous cannot be doubted. And for this and [various] reasons it appears to my mind that they may not have belonged to any of these species but might have been miraculously produced by God to punish the Hebrews. [Their] recovery was supernatural. Why may not the production of the serpents have been the same?



The effect of the [serpents'] bite was such, as to change the [character] of the person. As the poison spread through the system he seemed to lose all control of his reasoning powers and became more and more ungovernable until he grew rabid, the venom still preying on heart, and brain consuming them, and his form expands into an unsightly shape. Until at last the fierce struggle is over, and he is left in a state of stupor in which he dies.

The effects of evil habits on the human heart are such that if indulged in cannot be stayed; it is [morally] impossible to practice habitually one sin, and maintain the purity and elevation of [character] in other respects. The conscience becomes hardened, and it is silenced with more ease when our wishes urge us to other sins. Sinners grow worse and worse not as their capacity is enlarged and their means to do evil are increased, but as the habit of vice acquires strength; until at last their nature becomes so corrupt that out of it proceeds all actual transgressions. It is an [excessive] indulgence which forms the habit of guilt and degrades and bows them to misery; every new transgression adds strength and vigor to their already corrupt propensities which they feel will one day sink them to ruin. And by sin they are subject to death, and all miseries temporal, spiritual, and eternal. The sinner is a slave; he is not free who cannot govern himself, who cannot do what he sees and feels to be right. Thus bondage consists in his being the unresisting slave of passion and appetite, and his inability to control himself by reason and [conscience]. He is at the mercy of every temptation yet he [groans] in vain for the power to resist. You have all seen in numberless habits of vice the wretched victim mourning over his sins, sighing to return to innocence, and resolving in the bitterness of his soul never to offend again; yet at the first temptation, rushing to misery which he sees is surely approaching.

Who has not seen the struggles of an intemperate man to burst away the chains which his appetite has [imposed], striving for a time in tears then rushing with frenzied violence to an

indulgence which sinks him below the brute. Yet a life of sins is a life of restlessness, and anxiety. Men tire of sin, and pleasure, but they know not where to end; they do not [resort] to it from love but from a habit which is too painful to resist, or to be saved from a weariness of life, or from reproaches of [conscience]. Yet they look forward to it with a restless desire which only serves to [embitter] their present life, and they can only look back upon it with sorrow and remorse.

And what are the effects of evil? You see it in the haggard countenance—that [emaciated] and sinking [frame]—that [loathsome] train of disease and want and all the numberless forms of wretchedness which guilt has created. And is this all? Glance into the depths of that soul, and there you will see the bitter regret with which a life of sin is remembered, and the ragings of a wounded [conscience]; and still farther go to the bed of death, and see there the horrible anguish which rends the soul that stands trembling on the brink of the grave, and can look up only to an offended God and forward to his judgment.

In the comparison between the lifting up of the serpent, and that of Christ we learn that the serpent was lifted upon the pole or ensign, so Jesus Christ was not upon the cross. The object of God's command was not there because there was any healing power in the serpent, nor in the simple act of looking; but that they might through obedience to God's command exercise faith in his power to heal them.

The fiery serpent saved the Hebrews from the effect of the [serpent's] bite. Jesus Christ saves us from our sins not in our sins—from our sins. There is the difference: the serpent saved from the effect of the evil, Jesus Christ from the evil itself.

The object of natural sight for physical cure was to my mind that as it is necessary before we can exercise faith in anything we must have something upon which our faith may rest. And

presenting the object before the eye it formed a basis upon which to rest their faith in the promise of God. And so it is that with the spiritual eye, we are enabled to look to the crucified [redeemer] and trust him to save our souls for it is an acceptance of the divine and glorious truths which compose his [doctrine] that cleanses us from sin. The belief of the truth itself is of no other advantage than its effects in delivering from sin and changing the mind into the divine image: for this kind of knowledge is the kind which changes the mind from darkness to light, and delivers it from the reigning power of sin to the love of holiness, and to the obedience of the just.

All were free to look at the serpent and be saved. There was no decree by which they were compelled to look. Each must exercise his own free will. It is the same spiritually. God never compels any of his creatures to seek their [soul's] salvation, but he has provided a way and pointed in his word to Jesus as their [redeemer]. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." "Who hath loved us and [redeemed] us and washed from our sins in his own blood." "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool."

The invitation is universal, "Ho! Everyone that thirsteth; come ye to the waters of life. He that hath no money come ye buy and eat; yea come; buy wine, and milk without money and without price." God in mercy has by Jesus Christ promised eternal life to all, who by a patient [continuance] in the ways of well doing seek for glory, honor, and immortality, but they who do not comply with the conditions can have no claim to the reward.

As each must look for himself and as there was no human or possible cure except in obedience to [God's] command so must every man work out his own[soul's] salvation. No one can do it for him. As it is written, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

The [remedy] was simple and easily comprehended by all and within the reach of all. So is salvation placed with the attainment of every individual of the human family. The path is plain, so plain that the [wayfaring] man through a fool need not err therein. We are clearly instructed in our duty, and promised support under all its conflicts. We are invited, persuaded, commanded to obey his laws that we may be happy. Yet we are treated as the subjects of a moral government; and when he shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ he will reward them according to their works.

The command was to look, and to obey it was simply an exercise of the will. It did not require any strength to turn the gaze toward the serpent. Neither could we all purchase the cure.

One bite was fatal, and by refusing to look they would have as surely died as though no serpent had been provided.

The command given to us is the same, and to obey it is simply to submit our will to the will of God. It does not require any severe mental or physical exertions, just a simple letting go of self and clinging to Jesus. I read a [narrative] a short time [ago] which I think will illustrate this. A poor man whose mind has been much troubled by the question, “What is saving faith?” dreamed a dream which he thought explained it to him fully. He thought that he stood on some desolate spot on the very edge of a steep cliff. Far below him at the bottom of the cliff the sea dashed violently. He stood with only half a footing on the edge of the cliff when something—he knew not what—whirled him over the precipice, and he felt himself falling, and falling downward into the ocean beneath; but suddenly he could not tell how, he thought he [caught] hold of a crag on the side of the cliff as he was falling past it, and there he hung with one hand grasping a small piece of rock. He hung a few seconds when he felt the crag was crumbling in his fingers. What was he to do? The next second he must be dashed to the atoms. All at once he

turned and looked behind him and saw a figure dressed in pure white coming toward the cliff and walking on the water; the figure came nearer and nearer until he was very great. He could see the expression of his countenance, that it was kind and gentle, and as their eyes met, the figure whispered softly upward "Let go! Let go!" He let go and fell into his arms, and was saved. The poor man understood his dream then. The crag was self-righteousness and every false refuge that crumbles in the grasp of the sinner...The words, "Let go," were the same as "[Believe] on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Faith is the letting go of all other dependence and falling into the arms of Jesus. O! friend out of Christ. God help you to "let go."

As God provided no other [remedy] than this looking for the wounded Hebrews, so he has provided no other way of salvation than faith in the blood of his son.

All who looked at the brazen serpent lived, and all who did not died. So they who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior shall not perish, but have eternal life for he has promised eternal life to as many as believe on him. And in what beautiful language does our blessed Lord himself invite us to come to him. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and holy of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." How can we refuse to accept such an invitation when we think of the blessed Jesus who left the glory of heaven and [descended] to earth clothed in our humanity, suffering shame and poverty for he had no where to lay his head, and leading a life of persecution; put to the ignoble death of the cross, that we through his sufferings and death might receive eternal life. I say, when we think of all this how can we refuse to go to him. O! let us then while in this moral state cherish faith in God and in all his promises and prepare to dwell with God in heaven for Jesus will be there, and his spirit is a

spirit of love. The whole atmosphere of heaven is love. Contemplate the future world as...the very contemplation of it will serve in some measure to fit us for it. Dr. Doddridge has described the future world in the following beautiful strain:

No more fatigue, no more distress  
Nor sin nor death shall reach the place  
No groans shall mingle with the songs  
That warble from immortal tongues  
No rude alarms, no raging foes  
To interpret the long repose,  
At midnight shade, no clouded sun,  
To veil the bright, eternal noon.

**Sermon 2-Lucretia Mott**  
**“The Truth of God...The Righteousness of God”**  
**Sermon, Delivered at Marlboro Chapel, Boston, September 23, 1841**

It is highly satisfactory to me, my friends, to meet you. I rejoice to see so many fellow-beings without the usual distinctions which prevail in professing Christendom. I believe that when they are so brought together, they may hear, every man in his own tongue, the truths that may be spoken; inasmuch as all truth is from “the sempiternal source of light divine.” There is no change in its principles. They are, and they have been, and will be, from everlasting: in their origin, divine—in their nature, eternal.

All who are believers in the truth of God, and in the righteousness of God, must come to understand, that this alone can set us free. But have we fully understood and comprehended, how it is that only the truth can make free indeed? In order to do so, educational prejudices and sectarian predilections should be laid aside; though to convince men of the necessity of doing so, might require as notable a miracle as it did to convince men in a former age, that in all nations, those who “fear God and work righteousness, are accepted of him.”

But what is it to fear God? And what is it to work righteousness? It is as necessary now, as when the great apostle uttered it, to say to men, “Let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness, is righteous.” But what is the situation of most sects? What is their standard of righteousness? What evidence do they require of the fear of God?

Is it not the acknowledgment of some scheme of salvation, or some plan of redemption, as insisted on in theological systems, and taught in theological schools? Is it not a confession of some creed, or a joining of some denomination? And have many not thus blended the fear of God and the working of righteousness with outward and ceremonial rites, till the result has been a lowering of the standard of peace and righteousness, and of common honesty?

It becomes us to inquire, whether the plain precepts and principles, which find a response in the soul of every human being, and are confirmed by the inner sense which all possess, and which have not their origin in any sect, or body, or division, have not thereby been thought of less importance than forms and ordinances. If this is so, and if all see it in our various denominations, may we not all profitably come together in the acknowledgment of principles and practices not dependent upon the reception of any abstract doctrine, or form of worship? We may all feel here in thus considering the principles and working of righteousness—the willing and the doing good—not as strangers, but as much at home in the town in which we were born; for these principles are common to all, and are understood by all. This is not presented by me as a Quaker tenet. I desire not to stand before you as a sectarian, but to hold up principles of universal obligation.

I have seen that there is an objection, which seems reasonable to many minds, against women’s stepping forth to advocate what is right. Let me endeavor to remove these prejudices

and these objections: for I have often been made sensibly to feel how hard it is to “do the work of the Lord, when there is unbelief.”

I know that many claim high apostolic authority against this action of women. I am aware that the apostle Paul recommended to the women of Corinth, when they wanted information, to “ask their husbands at home.” I am not disposed to deny, that under the circumstances of the case, he did it wisely. But do we find him saying, that they were not to preach or prophecy? So far from it, that he has expressly given them directions how to preach and prophecy. And what this preaching and prophesying were, is defined by the same apostle as “speaking unto *men* to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” Anyone will, I think, see that to make a standing rule of the apostle’s directions to the ignorant Corinthian women, but in his declaration to the Galatians, that, to as many of them as had put on Christ, there was neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female; and also in his expressions of gratitude to the women helpers in the gospel.

Again, we find in the records of the evangelist, the fact that four daughters of one man became public advocates of the truth, and “honorable women not a few” are also stated to have done the same thing. We read, also, of the woman of Samaria going to the men of the city; and of Huldah, the prophetess. In the history of earlier times, we read that the villages were in ruins through the land of the Hebrews, and the highways unoccupied, till “Deborah arose—till she arose, another in Israel.”

This evening’s opportunity would be far too short to present the Bible argument, and I therefore refer you to this volume itself, as its paramount authority is so generally acknowledged among you, to see whether there is not far more plentiful testimony to the rightfulness of woman’s directly laboring for the gospel, than you had supposed from perusing it without reference to this question.



Was it not one of the first acts of the apostles, to announce, in the words of the prophet Joel, that the spirit of the Lord was poured out upon all *flesh*; --and was not this quoted to convince the people, that the prophesying and preaching of both sexes was in fulfillment of ancient prophecy? In the phrase in which “Phebe, the servant church,” is mentioned, those who are familiar with the original have found, that the same word, which is, in her case, translated *servant*, is, in the case of men, translated *minister*. And has not conscious evidence been afforded by this translation, of the priest-craft and monopoly of the pulpit, which have so long held women bound? I ask the sticklers for Bible authority, where they find the silence of women, command and obligation, binding on the church in all ages. But we find them assuming the right to choose what they will consider such. When the apostle recommends that widows shall not marry, they do not agree with him, and therefore they explain it as applicable only to those times of trouble and persecution; and do not consider it a standing rule.

I long for the time when my sisters will rise, and occupy the sphere to which they are called by their high nature and destiny. What a change would then appear in the character of woman! We should no longer find her the mere plaything of man, and a frivolous appendage of society. We should not find her so easily satisfied with a little domestic duty—with embroidering the light device on muslin and lace, or with reading the sentimental novel. When I look at the “Ladies Department” in our newspapers and magazines, I blush for my sex, and for the low sphere of action they are content with. I believe that if woman would but look seriously at herself, she would learn how great an evil her nature suffers in being prevented from the exercise of her highest faculties. What a different race would be brought forth—what a different and nobler generation should we behold in the next, from that which preceded it, if the highest duties of women were all fulfilled! I believe the tendency of truth, on this subject, is to equalize the

sexes; and that, when truth directs us, there will be no longer assumed authority on one side or admitted inferiority on the other; but that as we advance in the cultivation of all our powers, physical as well as intellectual and moral, we shall see that our independence is equal, our dependence mutual, and our obligations reciprocal.

It is this perception, my friends, that I long for. I feel bound, when in company with my sisters who have thought it improper or sinful to exercise their highest powers of mind on the most important subjects, to beseech them to think so no longer, and to come forth into that noble and becoming freedom which they, in common with man, have received:--so useful will they be in their own day, and so happy will be their influence upon generations yet to come.

I am aware that the imaginations of many have become so depraved, and their minds so enervated, by appeals to the passions and the imagination, from the inferior literature of the novelist, that it needs not only strong effort to arouse them from the lethargy in which they live, to true and noble activity; but a tender care is needed to preserve them from the evils consequent upon their long inactivity. I am willing to incur ridicule—to become a spectacle to angels and to men—if I thereby awaken any to a sense of what the times demand of them. This is a day of overturning and of change. Many are asking, “Who will show us any good?” Theories and abstractions will not satisfy them—outward observances will not be sufficient. The multitude who are seeking, cannot attain what they desire, but through the knowledge of themselves. I would speak to you in the spirit of the gospel of the blessed God, of that unerring guide which shall direct you. I shall use in characterizing it the language of a writer of your own: “All mysteries of science and theology fade away before the simple impressions of duty on the mind of a little child.”

We have each our different theories with regard to creeds and forms; but let us not put them on a level with what is of so much greater moment. While we tolerate (if that can ever be a proper word to use in such a connection), while we acknowledge the right of opinion, as regards the various creeds and forms, let us not place these above the pure and practical fruits of righteousness.

Is not this the reason why these fruits are so few in the world? Look at the low state of public morals; look at the prevalence and the general justification of war, and slavery, and oppression; look at all the vices of society, and see how the greatest abundance of creeds, and the utmost exactitude in forms, co-exist with them all; and judge ye, whether these are not held up, rather than doing justice and loving mercy.

What a field of labor does society now present! I rejoice to see the field white to the harvest. I rejoice in a belief that the members of society are beginning to take a practical view of its wants; and have, in some instances at least, found that they cannot be satisfied with a mere outward routine, but that something more efficacious is demanded by the present age. These are gathering themselves together in the support of what is right; and let us bid them Godspeed. Who can look at the crimes and sufferings of men, and not labor for reformation? Let us put our own souls in their souls' stead, who are in slavery, and let us labor for their liberation as bound with them. Let us look at the souls who are led away into hopeless captivity deprived of every right, and sundered from every happy association—the parents separated from their children, and all the relations of life outraged; and then let us obey the dictates of sympathy.

I cannot but rejoice in the efforts that they are making to arrest the progress of war. The offering of a prize for the best essay on the best mode of settling international disputes, and the thousands of persons who thronged to hear the addresses of George Harris at Birmingham on

capital punishment, afford a cheering indication of an enquiring state of the public mind in England. As enquiry proceeds, men will discover the principle of forgiveness, and will feel the power of the spirit of love. They will then become more consistent with the Christianity they profess, and will find that they must no longer indulge the spirit of retaliation. In the course of our progress in the application of these principles, we shall have to put this sentiment in practice. We shall then understand the true spirit of forgiveness, and conform our lives to its requisitions. How is it that high professors of the Christian name can forget the precepts of the blessed Jesus—"Love your enemies—bless them that curse you—do good to them that hate you—pray for them that despitefully sue you and persecute you." Did not the apostle acknowledge the truth of this principle of forgiveness, when he said, "Being defamed, we entreat—being reviled, we bless?"

The time will not permit me to enlarge, or I would turn your attention to further applications of gospel principles, and remind you, as we examined them together, that "he that doeth righteous is righteous," of whatever sect or clime.

I am aware that, in this city, the appeal has often been made to you in behalf of the suffering slave. I am sensible that most able appeals have been frequent here; but the time has come for you, not merely to listen to them, but to seek for the means of aiding in the working of this righteousness. Whether you should act in organized societies, or as individuals, it is not for me to decide for any; but we all have a part of the work to perform, for we are all implicated in the transgression. Let us examine our own clothing—the furniture of our houses—the conducting of trade—the affairs of commerce—and then ask ourselves, whether we have not each, as individuals, a duty which, in some way or other, we are bound to perform.

When I look only over professing Christendom my soul mourns over the doom to perpetual and unrequited toil, the entire deprivation of rights, the outrage of human affections, and the absence of all that makes life desirable, which all unite to weigh down the lives of so many millions, while so few are ready to raise the cry of justice and mercy on their behalf. Are there not men and women here, whom these things shall yet constrain to exertion, that they may be remedied? In how many ways may you not exercise your various powers for the alleviation of the miseries of those whose sufferings we have contemplated! You have pens and voices to commend their cause to others, and to portray their miseries so as to gain sympathy. To how many towns you might go, and awaken their inhabitants to the relief of these sufferings!

We are too apt to be discouraged, and to be impressed with a sense of the difficulty of the work of reform; but when we examine into the progress it makes, and behold the effects of Temperance, and Peace, and Anti-Slavery, we may be greatly encouraged, and bid each other Goodspeed, in full confidence that, in due time, we shall reap, if we faint not. We have sure evidence, from the success of past efforts, that the same will be the effect in the future. Hard as was the labor at first, there [are] now for less difficulties. Many hearts are now touched, and only need the word of encouragement to come forth in aid of those who so long struggled with so many disadvantages, under a load of odium and opposition, to commence the work now so happily advancing. Let me encourage the awakening soul to enter into the work. When the question arises as to the manner of doing so, I can only say that what we sincerely desire to do, we seldom lack means to accomplish. I know there is in the community a growing dislike [of] organizations; but those who adopt this view must remember, that it will not do for them to do nothing. "Herein is my Heavenly Feather glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

It is too generally understood by men, that their labors must be connected with missionary and church efforts, under submission to church-tests, and church forms: but it is time we made a proper distinction between those who merely cry, “Lord, Lord,” and do not his righteous will, and those who are bent on faithful obedience. I am aware that in this day of judging by verbal and ceremonial standards, that such as have not submitted to the forms and rituals of any church are obligated to suffer on that account in the opinion of their fellow men. But yjose feel that they are accountable to a higher power, and that “it is a small matter to be judged of any man’s judgment.” They look for guidance to their inner sense of right and wrong; and this is coming more and more to be acknowledged as the voice of god and his most intimate presence in the soul. Let me urge all, then, to be faithful to these manifestations of his will. It will [then] bring upon the reproach of high professors. But if they are faithful, they will be instant at all times in raising high the standard of righteous action, and they will, by their practice, do more to recommend the faith of God, than those who are denouncing them. Those who have regarded these good works more than plain dress, or formal speech, or observance of times, or stated reasons of vocal prayer, will be ready to proclaim that the gospel is not in these outward things, while some, who make high professions, are ignorant both of the scriptures and of the power of the gospel. Let us be faithful to the word lying in the heart, and there is no need to doubt but we shall be brought to love every good word and work, to promote the progress of righteousness, temperance, and peace and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

How often have I mourned, that so many in the cities depart from the plain path of integrity! How much selfishness and deception is there in trade! “It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he hath gone his way, then he boasteth.” How many look not on the things of Jesus Christ! But, so we not see that the principles of our holy religion would reform

commerce and trade, and lead every man to do justly? Surely the cry of the oppressed is entering into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Many who look at other lands, and witness the sufferings of their people, and see how the poor are crushed by oppression and taxation, to maintain the existence and the prerogatives of an aristocracy, turn with delight to the hope of a reform coextensive with the earth. They realize that true republicanism is true Christian democracy. But it is because they see not how reform is to be obtained, that they are slow of heart to believe in its possibility. Let them not participate in the wrong they acknowledge. "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." If we applied the precepts of Jesus to the directions of our own lives, how many that are now rich would become poor. I believe that the principles of righteousness can be carried out through the land, and that we show our reverence for God by the respect we pay his children. We do not sufficiently exercise our high moral nature. We resist the benevolent principles and feelings that would lead us forth into lanes and by-ways, that we might comfort and save the outcast and afflicted. We forget that this is true religion and undefiled, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We may, after the manner that some call heresy, worship the God of our fathers; but if we wish to serve him in the way prescribed by his dear Son, we shall carry out the principles of righteousness in the service of our brethren and of society; nothing doubting that if we do so, it will be well with us hereafter. Further we need not too curiously inquire, but be content with the evidence of god's peace in our souls, after having done his will. [*Liberator*, October 15, 1841].

**Sermon 3: The Reverend Melissa Frazier "God's Favorite Child"**  
**Luke 15: 11-32**

How does one measure their spiritual journey? It's not like watching the aging process.

Regardless of what age people think we are, we know every year that we're getting older. I wish

we could see and celebrate our walk with Christ like we celebrate birthdays and other special days.

But how do you measure your spiritual journey? How do you graduate from one faith step to another? From one bracket of belief to another? And what happens if you don't look any different or see any changes and you start aging like Benjamin Button? Never have I felt such a blow to my ego than when I was about to start college. My roommate and I had just finished moving everything into our dorm room. I was so excited. First time away from home. 18. Free. My dad took us out to dinner. My 5 year old half-brother was with us. When my dad received the check, he stopped the server and said, "There's something wrong here. This should be more." And with the biggest smile and wink towards me (like she was doing us all some huge favor) said in her Texas drawl, "Oh, no sir, for the little lady over here, the child's plate goes from 12 and under." Do you know what that does to an 18 year old, ready to start college in less than 24 hours??

I wonder what age people see our faith? This is the one place I hope we aren't age-defying or face-lifting. It's not about our parent's great genes or vice versa. How are you looking your spiritual age?

This story that Jesus tells in Luke has 3 characters. The younger son, the eldest son, and the Father. All of us exudes characteristics of all 3 in one way or another. We are not exempt from the feelings or actions described by Jesus. We each have gone and still go to a 'distant country' rather than remaining in God's presence. We each have at one time or another possessed attitudes of resentment against a wayward brother or sister and we each have welcomed someone back into God's loving arms.



Nevertheless, whatever state we find ourselves in today, be it the younger son or the eldest, we must realize that we are called to become the Father. Old and wise—spiritually speaking. There are plenty of 80 year olds still stuck in their 20's spiritually. Just like there are some 20 something's spiritually 80. But to be a person with no hidden motives, no attachments, no biases and to simply be someone who is willing to accept anyone with open arms—with no strings attached not only takes work, it takes wisdom and maturity. To shift from the Burger King mentality and only seeing 'my-way', to laying everything down, being completely selfless, and not needing to be catered to takes an abundant amount of growth and security in oneself. That is what a parent is. Watch the shift take place in this story.

Let's journey first with the younger son. The son left. He told his father to give him all the estate that would be left to him. This is by far the most hurtful, vindictive, offensive act anyone could have done in this culture.

It is written in "Literary-Cultural Approach to Parables",

"For over fifteen years I have been asking people of all walks of life from Morocco to India and from Turkey to the Sudan about the implications of a son's request for his inheritance while the father is still living. The answer has always been emphatically the same...the conversation runs as follows: Has anyone ever made such a request in your village? Never! Could anyone ever make such request? Impossible! If anyone ever did, what would happen? His father would beat him, of course! Why? The request means—he wants his father to die."

Not only does he want his father to die to receive the inheritance, he's gone off to a 'distant country'. This is not just a travel abroad trip. 'Distant Country' literally means a complete abandonment of the way he was brought up. All thoughts, actions, and life-style changed. It was an outright betrayal of his family values and the values of the community.

Can you see yourself in the younger son? I see myself. Not physically so to speak, but spiritually I have abandoned home for a distant country. Henry Nouwen describes it like this, “It is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace, that I am indeed carved in the palms of God’s hands and hidden in their shadows. Leaving home means ignoring the truth that God has “fashioned me in secret, moulded me in the depths of the earth and knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one.”

Because home is truly the center of our beings where we can hear the voice that says, “You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests.” Friends, we have left home. Because if we truly believed this statement, than there would never be a need to leave God’s side. WE would feel complete, adequate, set apart, special and valued. There would be no more need to compete, get jealous, react or have to prove ourselves. We could just be in the presence of God Almighty. We must never forget the voice of unconditional love and we must never go running to search for it where it can never be found!

There’s more to this son. The son becomes aware of his lost ness. All that he had lost—his money, his reputation, his friends, his self-respect—he still remained his father’s child. He knew he could return home. And as he got closer to his father’s house, his father welcomed him with outstretched arms. Giving him sandals for his feet—recognition that he was higher than slaves, a robe—signifying elite ness, and a ring signifying that he was his father’s son. God’s favorite child is one who returns to their Father, accepting his unconditional love.

Journeying on, we find ourselves beside the cold shoulder of the eldest son. This son had everything the Father had, partook in everything and was always in his Father’s presence—well, physically speaking. This one is the most difficult for the majority of us. The hardest conversion

for anyone is not the wayward person...it's the one who stayed home because they have left home, gone to a distant country and never walked off the front porch. Listen to the complaints from the oldest son, "All these years I have been working like a slave for you and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends."

Obedience and duty are now a burden and service has become slavery.

Friends, Joy and resentment can not coexist. This is difficult to diagnose. The eldest son did all the right things. He was obedient and dutiful, always worked hard and followed all the rules. He was admired, respected, and was a model son and citizen. Outwardly, he was faultless. But when the father's joy erupts because of his youngest returning home, something dark erupts inside of him making him boil with envy, resentment, selfishness and pure hatred.

In "The Return of the Prodigal Son", Henry Nouwen writes, "Looking deeply into myself and then around me at the lives of other people, I wonder which does more damage, lust or resentment? There is so much resentment among the "just" and the "righteous." There is so much judgment, condemnation, and prejudice among the "saints". There is so much frozen anger among the people who are so concerned about avoiding "sin."

It doesn't take much to see this attitude. All over our country and world, people are justifying killing people in the name of God, hating someone in the name of God, not welcoming or loving someone in the name of God.

This son never acknowledges his own brother. Is not even concerned with his own father's happiness over his son's return.

Friends, God's love can not be forced on anyone. But it doesn't change God's love towards others. Which means, that God's favorite child is also the eldest. Because the Father also goes out to beckon the eldest son to join them in the celebration.

In God, everyone is completely loved! Everyone is God's favorite child. There is no one better, no one with more trophies or badges, no more pictures of one child on God's wall than another nor anyone's artwork more higher on God's refrigerator. We are all loved, valued, and treasured the same. When will we ever stop trying to prove ourselves?

How do we overcome the mentality of being owed something or feelings of resentment towards the youngest? Elizabeth Gilbert in "Eat Pray Love" writes the perfect picture of what we elders must do to us younger siblings.

"When I was growing up, she writes, my family kept chickens. We always had about a dozen of them at any given time and whenever one died off—taken away by hawk or fox or by some obscure chicken illness—my father would replace the lost hen. He'd drive to a nearby poultry farm and return with a new chicken in a sack. The thing is, you must be very careful when introducing a new chick to the general flock. You can't just toss it in there with the old chickens, or they will see it as an invader. What you must do instead is to slip the new bird into the chicken coop in the middle of the night while the others are asleep. Place her on a roost beside the flock and tiptoe away. In the morning, when the chickens wake up, they don't notice the newcomer, thinking only, "She must have been here all the time since I didn't see her arrive." The clincher of it is, awaking within this flock, the newcomer herself doesn't even remember that she's a newcomer, thinking only, "I must have been here the whole time..."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is how we should treat one another. Part of the family. Part of the community. Seeing others as if they had been here all along. We need to see others as God sees them.

And now to our final destination in our journey...becoming like the Father. Having the heartbeat of God.

Loving without expecting any love in return, giving without wanting to receive, inviting without hoping to be invited, holding without asking to be held. This takes security and trust. Complete community. Divine compassion. A seeing that sees beyond humanity and into the very face of God.

It is sooooo much easier to pull away and withdraw when our feelings have been hurt. Demand authority when control is lost. But this Father's love, God's love is too great for that. He wants freedom of love and so should we. God's only desire is to bless. God has no desire to punish His children. They have already been beaten down enough either by their own inner or outer waywardness.

I can't humanly understand God's love. How can all of God's children be his favorite? But they are. God loves you!

How do we become like the Father? By not looking at the world through our own low self-esteem but through the eyes of God's love. God is an all giving all forgiving father who does not measure out His love to His children by the way they act. This is the core message of the Gospel.

Can I accept that I am worth looking for? Do I believe that there is a real desire in God to simply be w/ me? Do I want to be like the father? Do I want to be not just the one who is being forgiven, but also the one who forgives; not just the one who is being welcomed home, but also the one

who welcomes home; not just the one who receives compassion, but the one who offers it as well?

The fact is, each one of us will always be God's favorite child. The challenge is the question is, will we believe it and then live it?

#### **Sermon 4: The Reverend Melissa Frazier "What Do You Need?"**

##### **John 2: 1-11s**

One of my friends got married my jr. year in college. She put me in charge as the lead hostess for the reception. I was to make sure all was set up, things looked just right, and everything ran smoothly. Not a problem! Until I noticed that after about 150 people had come and picked up their plates going from table to table. I recognized that the other 300 guests hadn't arrived yet and already the plates and forks were becoming more and more sparse. I ran back to the kitchen looking for boxes or anything resembling what might look like a crystal plate. I found the mother of the bride and asked her where the other plates were. The caterer was in charge of bringing all the plates and china along with the food. One minor detail—the caterer was no where to be found and neither were more plates. As the mother of the bride completely freaked out, I said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of this!" I began watching for people who looked 'finished' with their food and began inching my way to them, smiling, and asking if I could take their plate. They thought I was being kind when all I wanted was that plate. I began washing plates and forks left and right. No one ever knew except the mother of the bride and of course those serving at tables who saw me every min grabbing plates. Weddings and receptions. Not the time for a crisis, a mix up or a mess up. Everything must go according to plan and according to the ridiculous high expectations everyone puts on this one day affair for family and friends.

Both in the OT and the NT we find weddings as a huge undertaking but also a joyous occasion—like they are today. The marriage ceremony was much longer with LOTS of feasting and celebrations. The feast lasted about a week. And the entire community was involved. This was not just a friends and relative event. Imagine the whole city of Greenville joining your wedding and reception for 7 days?!?

So here we have Jesus' mother Mary, Jesus, and some of his disciples at this wedding in Cana. They must be pretty close to the wedding party—Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding according to verse 2 and Mary is serving food and wine. She is more than a guest as well but Scripture does not tell us whether she is either a close friend or a relative of the wedding party.

They are well into their festivities when Mary becomes aware of a horrible and major embarrassment to the wedding party—there is no wine. They are completely out. The guests have no idea what is happening. Either way, “In the Gospel According to John”, Leon Morris writes:

“To run out of supplies would be a dreadful embarrassment in a ‘shame’ culture; there is some evidence it could also lay the groom open to a lawsuit from aggrieved relatives of the bride.”

As if becoming the laughing stock of your community isn't bad enough, you also get sued. The only equivalency I can think of today would have to be sitting down for a meal and only half of the guests getting served—even though everyone attending RSVP'd or only 1/3 of the guest get a piece of wedding cake. However, no one would get sued!

But this era had the worst repercussions because the entire village and community was involved which would lead to horrible consequences on ones children's children.

And here is Mary completely in the middle of this mess. She steps up and tells Jesus, “They have no wine.” We can’t hear her tone but I can imagine some uneasiness might have been underlying—but also a nonchalant statement b/c, after all, she does know who Jesus is. She has been surrounded by His miracles since her conception of him, she was surrounded by Elizabeth’s miraculous conception with John the Baptist and although Jesus has yet to have performed any miracles—His mother knows that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

Expectations are in this 4 word sentence—We have no wine. Although this is not a question, it is apparent that Mary hopes Jesus will do something about this social and cultural disaster.

Jesus calls her *woman*. This, in no way is a derogatory term. It’s the same Greek word Jesus will later use at the cross in John 19:26, “Woman, here is your son” when he is referring to Mary and the disciple John.

Jesus asks Mary, “Why are you saying ‘we’ have a problem?”

This question reminds me of the infamous one liner from Apollo 13, “Houston, we have a problem.”

Anybody ever use the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural language to include someone who really isn’t involved in the issue? How about our 4 word phrase: ‘We need to talk’ is clearly defined as, “I have something or an issue to discuss with you, you need to listen and then you need to fix this.”

And Jesus is simply asking his mother why the issue involves them. But also notice that Jesus never gives her a yes or no answer to her four word phrase. And Mary is not offended or hurt.

She addresses the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Mary neither pleads or questions Jesus. She simply leaves the situation to Jesus to handle it—in His way and in His time.



A lot of water was kept on hand for Jewish ceremonial washings. Like 150 gallons worth. The water was stored in huge stone jars. Very heavy. And certainly not very sanitary to drink.

Nevertheless, Jesus tells the servants to fill each stone water jar to the brim with water and serve it to the chief steward.

Now this is where it gets to be absolutely astounding! So basically these servants are about to serve the head chef AKA 'The Boss' 'bath' water. GULP! What faith these servants had!

There are no fire works. No abrahgadabrah's. According to this passage, Jesus doesn't even touch the water or the jars. Jesus doesn't even say, "Let there be wine." In fact, Jesus doesn't even say anything.

The servants have no idea it is wine. Nevertheless, the servants obey the Lord—immediately. No questions asked. No complaining. Not even a word of protest or hesitation.

I wonder what the water into wine looked like when it was being poured. Did it become purple or just for the fun of it, was it a white wine that never changed colors?

Whatever the case may be, we know that the suspense must have been agony for these servants.

And then the gleeful and totally mesmerized and surprised head steward breaks out and says, "This is the best of the best. Everyone knows that you serve the best wine first and the cheapest and worst wine last. But you have saved the best for last!"

Not only is everyone thoroughly enjoying the party, the bridegroom has now become a hero b/c of this fabulous wine.

What do you need?

We learn a lot about God incarnate, God becoming human from His first miracle.

First, we learn that we need to make known our needs. Even the smallest trivial issues we face, God cares. God cares about us needing a close parking place after knee surgery, he cares about us getting a doctor's appt, needing to be understood at a business meeting, he cares about flat tires and frozen pipes and lost car keys and smoking washing machines. He cares about school and tests and stress. This non-essential, non-life threatening issue of no wine mattered to Jesus. God also cares about our non-essentials!

Have you truly asked God for what you need knowing that nothing is too petty? We know that God is not a vending machine or a drive thru service. Our prayers are not a wish list or dealing with a 'genie in a bottle'. But our all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God wants to be the center of our entire life—not just a couple of hours on Sunday morning and Wed. evening. God is interested in the whole package.

This is the joy of having a relationship with God. Everything that we are. Everything that we deal with in our lives on a daily basis, God wants to be a part of and know about—from each one of us. WE are important. We are God's children.

Of all the miracles Jesus performed in the Gospels: healing an official's son, feeding the 5000, walking on water, giving sight to a blind man, raising Lazarus from the dead—the very first miracle is Jesus turning water into wine for a wedding party.

What do you need? We must ask.

Secondly, we learn after we have asked about our needs, that we must expect and trust God will answer. This one can be difficult to grasp. Because delays in God answering our prayers are not denials of our prayers. It's just not God's timing or God's best for us.

Jesus could not perform this miracle until the need was brought to Him and until the servants trusted and expected that Jesus had a plan.

Expectation—notice also that not everyone was included in knowing what had happened. Only Mary, the servants and the few disciples experienced this miracle firsthand. Expect God to answer behind-the-scenes to your questions and the way your needs get met.

Miracles happen everyday and when we watch and become aware of our surroundings, we'll see and experience them. God won't always answer through a burning bush or through a parted sea. It may be an unexpected check in the mail which is the same amount that is due for a medical bill. It may be a call from a friend affirming you right when you need someone to tell you how special you are. It could be God revealing Himself to you in the stillness moment or in a sunrise. Expect to see God, hear God, and trust that God loves you—even in the midst of your pain and suffering. Even in the midst of not having anything left to give.

How often are we surrounded by God's grace! His love is constantly active. "Yet, we often fail to discern his love, seeing only the hands of those who give us the wine and not realizing where it comes from and the grace it represents."

We become so consumed with our issue or issues that we lose sight of everything else and anyone in need.

Lastly, we learn that after we have asked and expect God to answer in God's way and timing, we must work while we wait. Waiting on God does not mean to sit on the couch expecting Him to do all of the work. According to this passage, Jesus never lifted a finger. It was the servants filling the 6 jars with water and lifting them and taking them to the chief steward.

All throughout the Gospels, we read how Jesus tells a man to pick up his mat and walk, to go and wash the mud from his eyes, to pass out the bread and fish, to take off the burial cloths of Lazarus, to wash feet, to feed the poor, to help the sick, to clothe the naked, to visit the imprisoned.

This is what we are to do while we wait in expectation for God to do what God does best—meet our needs according to God’s timing and plan. God sees the big picture. Our focus is only on the here and now.

As Mary, the servants, and some of the disciples learned and observed, Jesus’ miracle produced not only the best quality of wine—it produced abundantly more than was needed. What a gift Jesus gave to this married couple! Leftovers! We read in the other Gospels that when Jesus fed the crowd of 5000 and the crowd of 4000 that there were plenty of leftovers as well.

Because of this miracle, there was no shame or lawsuit brought upon the wedding party. Respect was brought to them and Jesus’ glory was revealed—to a few.

Verse 11: “And his disciples believed in him.”

The major purpose behind every miracle and sign in John’s Gospel is teaching us about the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The reason is simple: that all of us may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in believing we will have an eternal relationship with God.

Do you believe? There is nothing more important and no decision more important than what you believe about the work and person of Jesus Christ. God incarnate. The word becoming flesh and dwelling/pitching a tent and making a home amongst us. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Almighty God, Prince of Peace, Forgiver of everything we have done wrong. Wanting and longing to be a part of each of our lives—if we’ll let Him. God wants to shower us with a super-abundance of blessings.

Will you let God?

God's glory revealed in all the lowliest and unexpected places: a stable in Bethlehem, in a muddy Jordan River, and on a bloody cross on Golgotha. Jesus brought joy and blessed a couple at their wedding party.

Jesus wants to also bring us joy and bless us too. But we have to ask and then expect for Him to work in His timing, in His way and as we're waiting, to work. Continue living and not let our circumstances consume us. Continue on your journey knowing that you are never alone.

Knowing that God cares for you. God loves you.

What have you brought empty this morning? What do you need filled in your life?

**Sermon 5: The Reverend Lucy Lind Hogan Proper 27 B November 8, 2009  
Frederick Presbyterian Church "Important Nobodies"**

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;

the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers;

upholding the orphan and the widow . . . .

Ps. 146:8-9

The scorching heat of the afternoon sun

shimmered in the Temple courtyard

driving all sensible people into the somewhat cooler shade

of the colonnade.

Gradually the noises of the crowds dimmed -

growing quieter and quieter as people fled the glare.

A group slowly reconvened in a corner

sitting about the feet of their rabbi, their teacher.

“There, look,” Jesus motioned, pointing across the courtyard.

Peter looked up expecting to see one of the scribes or Pharisees

parading by with his fawning entourage –

perhaps, the scribe that Jesus had just been excoriating

for foreclosing –

for “devouring widows houses.”

But nobody was there . . .

Well, that was not exactly correct.

An older woman, a widow

was shuffling across

the now empty and *stifling* courtyard.

Yes, Peter thought, he was right – nobody was there –

she was nobody.

Nobody . . .

This morning we have heard the stories of three women.

It is unusual in the scriptures to hear the stories of all women.

But, if you want to talk about the least of the least -

no one was more least, more nobody

than a woman, than a widow.

- Naomi, the widow of Elimelech of Bethlehem in Judah

(hmmm, Bethlehem,

remember that, it will be important later)

Naomi, who is trapped in Moab after the death of her husband and sons.

- Ruth, a Moabite (a gentile), the widow of Chilion (which means frail)

Naomi and Elimelech's son.

- The unnamed woman in the Temple square.

.....

We live in an age in which no one wants to be a nobody

This is an age in which everyone longs to be famous, to be a celebrity.

People want to walk around in designer clothes,

and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,

and to have the best eats in church

and places of honor at The Tasting Room or Volt.

People want to be stars –

and will apparently go to great lengths to achieve stardom.

People will sing, dance, exercise to lose weight.

They will even travel to distant islands and eat bugs.

Many of you may be following our own local celebrity –

Brian Voltaggio and his adventures on “Top Chef.”

Brian is discovering the joys and challenges of becoming a star.

He has gone from the quiet “nobody” working magic in his kitchen,

To being someone people want to see and meet;

an important somebody.

A television star.

...

But this quiet afternoon in the Temple courtyard,

Jesus wanted the disciples (wants us)

To pay attention to a nobody.

Jesus want to tell us that this is an important nobody.

.....

The scriptures are filled with nobodies –

nobodies who played important roles in the unfolding of

God's story with us.

Where could we begin?

Noah? Nobody

Abraham and Sarah? Nobodies from Ur (out in the middle of nowhere!)

David? The youngest son they almost forgot out in the field.

Amos? A shepherd and dresser of fig trees

Mary? A teenaged nobody from Nazareth

Peter, James, John – fisherman (not kings or scribes or Pharisees)

Naomi and Ruth were definitely nobodies

In human eyes they were nobodies – but in God's eyes?

Well . . . that is what this sermon is all about

Human nobodies are God's somebodies! God's celebrities

who, with God's help, do great things.

We have to remember, as God reminded the prophet Samuel

when Samuel had gone to Bethlehem (there it is again)

to anoint a new king . . .



Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature . . . for the Lord does not see as mortals see, they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7)

How do you mortals see?

We look on appearances, bank accounts, positions, titles . . .

But God looks on the heart.

What does it mean to be an important nobody in God's eyes?

Let's take a look again at the stories of these three women.

First, an important nobody is someone who is loving, faithful, and resourceful.

The story of Naomi and Ruth –

is a story of faithfulness, love, and survival.

It is the story of two women who loved and who helped one another  
in a life threatening situation.

To be a widow with no sons or grandsons to care for her –  
was to be a woman with no safety net.

Even today, in many parts of the world, women are totally dependent on men.

In many middle eastern countries women cannot leave their homes  
unless they are in the presence of a man  
(even if that is their 14 year old brother.)

While her name, Naomi means pleasantness,

She declares, "Call me Mara – bitter."

Naomi's husband and her two sons had died while they were in exile.

They had left their home in Bethlehem because of a famine

And traveled to Moab.

Now she was alone.

She was a refugee without anyone to care for her

except her two daughters-in-law.

What was she to do?

Naomi/Mara told her Ruth and Orpah to return to their families;

maybe they would take them back in.

Orpah does leave. But not Ruth.

Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge;

Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. (Ruth 1:16)

(We often read this at weddings,

Ignoring the fact that this is actually

a daughter-in-law speaking to her mother-in-law.)

They are nobodies who love and care for one another, who are faithful.

And they are nobodies who are resourceful.

Together they return to Bethlehem and there

Naomi arranges for Ruth to meet one of her husband's relatives, Boaz.

Boaz was somebody. He was prominent in town, and wealthy.

And he quickly fell in love with Ruth.

With marriage came a new life.

Wonderful for Naomi and Ruth – but that is not why we tell their story.

The reason we tell their story is the second lesson we learn

from these nobodies.

An important nobody is someone whose actions

have long ranging consequences. . .

but that are effects that she may never see.

The story of Ruth,

The reason we tell her story

is because of her grandsons and

great, great, many great grandsons.

(I am very attentive to grandmothers right now –

since I became one on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October.)

Remember I told you to pay attention to the fact that Naomi and Elimilech

were from Bethlehem?

Ruth and Boaz had a son, Obed,

who had a son named Jesse,

who had a son . . . David.

Ruth, a foreigner, a gentile from Moab was the great-grandmother of

King David.

Ruth, a foreigner, a gentile was the great, great, grandmother of Joseph –

In a few weeks we will tell the story once more . . .

All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. (Luke 2: 3-4)

This nobody was the great . . . great grandmother of Jesus.

.....

God's "nobodies" are people who are loving, faithful, resourceful.

God's nobodies know that their actions are part of God's plans –  
and contribute to the building of the kingdom,  
even if they don't see that.

.....

And, finally, an important nobody, God's somebody,  
gives all to God.

Generations later – Ruth's great great great, many great grandson, Jesus,  
was seated in the courtyard of the Temple.

He looked out and saw another widow, an important nobody.

Surrounded by the glory, the beauty, the grandeur of the Temple, he would shortly tell the disciples:

“not one stone will be left here upon another;  
all will be thrown down.” (Mk. 13:2)

There, in the Temple courtyard which had been built  
with monies given by wealthy, important people

To prove how great they were –

(can't you see all of the plaques?)

But who does Jesus praise? A poor widow.

Quietly, unobtrusively she moved across the square

now that all of the important people had retreated to cool comfort.

She did not want them to see the meager offering she made.

How could her two copper coins compare to the  
huge gifts that had built the Temple?

The King James translation reads:

“She threw in two mites, which make a farthing.”

(A mite was a small Flemish copper coin with little face value.)

(When I was growing up, one of our Lenten disciplines was to put coins into a  
Mite Box. I had no idea what a mite was.)

“There, look,” Jesus said, “do you see her?”

Out of her poverty she has put in everything she had.

She is somebody.

Peter, James, John, if you want to be important,

If you want to sit on my right hand,  
do as she has done.

Do not do as the scribes do.

Do as this important nobody has done.

While the two coins will seem insignificant to the treasurer. . . .

to God they are amazing.

God does not see as mortals see . . . God looks on the heart,

And her heart is “as big as all outdoors.”

She has given God her all –

The good news, my dear friends, is that we are all important nobodies.

We are all precious in God's sight, loved and cherished.

And we are all people who can, out of that love, do amazing things.

Small and great.

We don't have to sing, dance, or eat bugs (thank goodness.)

But, what are we to do?

Earlier in the day, before they retreated to the portico,

a scribe had asked Jesus that question –

“Which commandment is the first of all . . .”

What are we to do?

Here, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; (Jesus reminded him)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength . . .

And your neighbor as yourself.

Naomi, Ruth, and this widow show us how to be important nobodies –

They help us to see that we are

To be loving, faithful, creative and resourceful.

To trust that God is working in and through our actions

to do things that we can only begin to imagine.

And we are to give all we have, are, wish to be to God and God's people.

Naomi, Ruth, this unnamed widow . . .

They loved God with all their hearts, souls, minds, strength,

They loved their sisters, mothers, neighbors,  
and they teach us all how to be  
important nobodies.

**Sermon #6: The Reverend Lucy Lind Hogan “Matters of Death and Life” June 28, 2009**

**Proper 8B Mark 5:21-43**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. . .

Out of the depths we cry.

What a joy and honor to be here with you this morning.

Mark tells us the story of Jesus,

“the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,”

in urgent, matter-of-fact terms.

There are no singing angels or adoring kings bearing gifts;

no manger, no stable, no gentle, tender, loving mother.

No, the story of this life (and death and life again)

begins with the startling message of a wild man - a

“Voice crying in the wilderness”

It is the voice of John the Baptist crying –

“Prepare the way of the Lord.”

We hear the baptizer and we hear of a baptism.

The message we hear is “You are my son, the beloved”

And then “The Spirit **immediately** drove him out into the wilderness.

With that Jesus, and we, are off and running.

“The time is fulfilled,” Jesus proclaims.

“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe.”

Repent and believe. Jesus’ message, Mark’s good news, Mark’s gospel,

**is** about matters of life and death.

So, Mark tells us, Jesus went out into the world -

teaching and preaching and healing.

Healing . . .

Mark tells us that Jesus healed **anyone**.

He healed lepers.

He healed the mother-in-law of his friend Simon (Peter.)

He healed a paralytic – “Take up your mat and go home.”

Over and over again we hear of these healings.

And we hear that all were amazed.

Should we be surprised that everyone had heard of this rabbi, this teacher?

Should we be surprised that people came from everywhere

to see him, hear him, to lay their sick at his feet?

Crowds surrounded him wherever he went –

bringing to him their matters of life and death.

### **Matters of Life and Death**

That is why **we** are here today –

we know that our worship, our life together as the church,



the people of God, the body of Christ,

are about matters of life and death.

As I wrote this sermon I was speaking with my best friend who is a pastor.

Let me tell you of a few days in her life . . .

She had to conduct the funeral for a 28 year old member of her church -

killed instantly in an collision with a truck.

As she prepared for that funeral – she got word that

the 55 year old husband of her secretary

had, suddenly, unexpectedly, dropped dead.

That would be her secretary who is currently in the midst of

chemo-therapy for cancer.

The next day she went to do the graveside service for a parishioner's sister;

a sister who had died suddenly –

a sister to whom the woman had not spoken for many years.

My friend then went to sit with another parishioner

preparing for his cancer surgery in a few days.

Matters of life and death.

### **Come and Lay Hands on Her**

Matters of life and death – that was why Jairus went looking for Jesus.

Jairus – a leader of the synagogue, a ruler of the people, an important man –

went looking for this rabbi he had heard all about.

But, unlike Nicodemus, who went in the cover of darkness,

Jairus went in broad daylight – he didn't care who saw him.

Jairus pushed his way through the jostling crowd.

People were everywhere;

people trying to get close to Jesus.

They were crying out – shouting -

“Look **this** way.” “Touch **me**.” “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.”

Jairus ran.

He shoved his way through the women, the men, the children.

He thrust away the blind, the lame teetering on their crutches.

They fell in his wake – but he didn’t care.

He didn’t care about them – he cared about his daughter, his little girl;

his little girl who was lying on her bed – sick to death.

Finally, there! There was the teacher. He saw his back.

Jairus rushed ahead. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet.

He wanted to make sure that Jesus didn’t go any further.

He wanted to make sure that Jesus heard his plea.

He wanted to make sure that Jesus came with **him**.

“My little daughter is at the point of death.

Come and lay **your** hands on **her**,

so that she may be made well and live.”

**This was a matter of life and death.**

**Now There was a Woman . . .**

Did she feel his arm on her shoulder, pushing her aside?

Was she one of the crowd who fell in Jairus’ wake?

Did she cower as this great man crossed her path,  
afraid that this leader of the synagogue would scold her  
for going out in public, contaminating all she touched?

This woman, this unnamed woman -

this woman who has suffered with a flow of blood for 12 long years?

This woman who was, therefore, unclean – rejected by everyone she knew?

But she was on a mission herself. She too wanted to see the rabbi, Jesus.

She had heard that he would

talk to anyone pharisees or pariahs;

heal anyone, touch anyone.

He wasn't afraid. He proclaimed that the kingdom,

the reign of God had come near.

The reign of God – the time of healing of wholeness, of *Shalom*.

Could she be made clean? Could she be made whole?

And she knew that his power was great –

She didn't need to talk to him, to touch him,

if she just touched the hem of his robe,

that would be enough.

It was a matter of life and death.

### **Matters of Death and Life**

Mark tells us the story of these people –

a desperate, loving father

a dying twelve year old girl

a despairing older woman

to tell us that the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news is

not about life and death – it is about **death** and **life**.

In the middle of the chaos and crowd –

Jesus knew that this woman had touched him –

that she was healed.

Jesus scoffed at the crowd gathered around the home of Jairus –

Get away from here - there is always hope, always new life –

“*Talitha cum.*” Little girl, get up.

Matters of death and life.

We have come together this morning to praise God,

to thank God for healing and wholeness,

for new life,

and to proclaim to the sin-sick world

that there is always life; there is always hope.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu,

in his book, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*

writes –

God created order out of disorder,

cosmos out of chaos,

and God can do so always,

can do so now.<sup>ii</sup>

Our's is a God of death and life,

and we are a people of death and life.

Well, what does that mean for us?

What does it look like to live these lives of hope?

How do we live lives of death **and** life?

## **Health Care Plans**

Matters of life and death, health care, and medicine

are in the news every day.

As a disclaimer, I must note that I have a front row seat

at these discussions and debates,

my husband is a dermatologist.

We do not have the time this morning,

nor I do not have the expertise

to engage in a lengthy discussion of the proposals being made.

But I would suggest that one way to be the people of death and life

is to be involved in the discussions –

and to advocate for plans that provide health care for all people.

Health care is an issue of justice as much as it is about healing.

We follow a savior who knew that everyone was a beloved child of God.

He reached out to poor and rich alike.

He healed the daughter of a synagogue ruler and an outcast woman.

So, we are to care about these debates – to follow them,

to contact our representatives.

To let them know we care about plans that make

health care available for all people.

## **New Life**

To be the people of death and life –  
means that we have a very different understanding of wholeness  
of *shalom*.

Yes – the woman was healed of her hemorrhage.

Yes – the little girl did get up and begin to walk about.

The gospels are filled with stories of the blind who see, the deaf who hear,  
the lame who “pick up their mats and walk home.”

We celebrate miracles everyday – people who are healed,

People who have successful surgery, who recover from heart attacks,

Who are not cancer victims but cancer survivors.

But we also know that there are times when  
wholeness does not mean healing the way the world thinks of healing.

There are times when the blind stay blind,  
when the cancer does remain,  
when the child does die.

Jesus has helped me to understand  
that wholeness may have very different face from what the world expects.

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses  
for whom Jesus offers healing through strength to face  
what life presents them.

Perhaps you - or someone you know and love

has faced illness with strength and hope.

I think of my friend Al who lost both his legs in a terrible accident.

But it was not the end of his life – he was able to raise his daughter.

I think of someone like Professor Randi Pausch –

who witnessed to the joy of life even as he was dying of pancreatic cancer.

I think of someone like Mattie Stepanek.

Last Monday was the fifth anniversary of Mattie’s death –

A young man who touched many in his brief life.

He wanted to be remembered as a

poet, a peacemaker, and a philosopher who played!

Mattie was only fourteen when he died.

He was born with dysautonomic mitochondrial myopathy.

All of the automatic systems of our being –

breathing, heart rate, blood pressure – would not work for Mattie.

He was not healed – but Mattie was given new life and made whole.

So, on July 17<sup>th</sup>, which would have been Mattie’s nineteenth birthday –

Say a prayer of thanksgiving for his life and witness –

That God heals us in many ways.

### **The Beautiful Circle**

The year before he died Mattie wrote that he felt -

“very blessed just to be alive at age 13.” Children born with his disease do not usually live very long. Mattie knows that each day is a gift, and he makes the most of it. He says he gets his strength from God and his mom, and also from the people that become part of his circle of life.

"People tell me I inspire them. And that inspires me. It's a beautiful circle, and we all go around together, with and for each other. What a gift," says Mattie.<sup>iii</sup>

To be the people of death and life is to know

how important is that **beautiful circle** of God, of families and friends –

how important it is to be that beautiful circle of people,

the church, who gathers together to pray and praise,

support, encourage, and help each other everyday.

Through God's love and support

we are able to be that beautiful circle.

Last week – with the Metro accident

we saw the importance of reaching out to help others.

As soon as the accident occurred people rushed to help those injured.

They got them out of the trains – they began to apply first aid.

After observing that he had been living a life of “me, myself, and I”

Courtland Milloy wrote of the accident –

My initial reaction to the fatal crash – I could have been on that train – was little more than a

self-obsessed “lucky me.” Thankfully, sorrowfully, that began to change as I watched an read

news accounts of people who were actually caring more about others than themselves . . . place

their safety at risk in a rush to aid the injured. . . . It is ironic that public tragedy seems to bring

out the best in us. Making us more aware of our profound capacity for sacrifice and compassion.

. . . Unsung heroes – they were on the train. And for that I could be truly grateful.<sup>iv</sup>

Mattie was about the age of Jairus' little daughter when he died.

We don't know what happened to her after Jesus took her by the hand



and raised her up off her death bed.

But perhaps she and her parents sang praises to God with words

that sound much like a poem that Mattie Stepanek wrote -

A champion is a winner,

A hero.

Someone who never gives up

Even when the going gets rough.

A champion is a member of

A winning team.

Someone who overcomes challenges

Even when it requires creative solutions

A champion is an optimist,

A hopeful spirit.

Someone who plays the game,

Even when the game is called life.

Especially when the game is called life.

There can be a champion in each of us,

If we live as a winner,

If we live as a member of the team,

If we live with a hopeful spirit,

For life.<sup>v</sup>

### **Living lives of Death and Life**

Courtland Milloy ended his article with the observation that:

Maybe it's just me. But if sending out our hearts, thoughts and prayers can create peace and solace, perhaps we should try it more often.

This morning we have been invited, once again, to live lives of death and life

Jesus is reaching out to each one of us,

little boy, little girl, men, women he calls,

“get up.”

Get up and live with a hopeful spirit for life

bringing comfort, solace to all around us

and joining Jesus in the healing of the world!

Father of us all,

we give you thanks and praise,

that when we were sick and dying

you met us in your Son and took us by the hand.

Dying and living he declared your love,

gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.

May we who are, together, Christ's body live his risen life.

May we bring life to others.

May we, whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world.

Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,

so that we and all your children shall be free,

and may the whole earth live to praise your name;

through Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*

1. Garrett, Greg, *Stories from the Edge A Theology of Grief*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, p.1
2. Mattie Stepanek <http://www.mattieonline.com/about.htm>
3. Courtland Milloy, "Selflessness Amid Tragedy Offers Solace." *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2009, B1
4. Mattie Stepanek, "On Being a Champion." <http://www.mattieonline.com/about.htm>

**Sermon 7: The Reverend Shauna Hannan, Sermon written for Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly (no title) May 2010, John 13:31-35; Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6.**

The Holy gospel according to Saint John the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter.

Let me set the scene for you: Jesus has made the decision not to walk openly in public - it's just too dangerous. So just before Passover and he is gathered with his disciples, the inner circle, for a meal. While they were eating Jesus gets up from his place in order to kneel at the feet of his disciples and wash their feet. After the footwashing, Jesus announces that one of those gathered will betray him. Upon handing Judas a piece of bread (?) which was the sign for the one who would betray, Judas gets up and leaves the room.

[READ]

The gospel of our Lord.

[SING]

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Sisters and brothers, It's about Jesus; that is, who we are, what we say, what we do, the leaders we elect, the campaigns we initiate, how we act with and toward one another, it's all about Jesus.

Although, get this, Jesus, the crucified and risen one, our Lord, makes it about us. Now that is humbling. Jesus connects our identity with his. He does this so that, finally, it will once again be about God.

Jesus includes his disciples, you and me, by giving us a gift—a gift in the form of a commandment; that we love one another. This is no ordinary love, though, as if there is such a thing...ordinary love. But this love is particularly extra-ordinary; because it is love defined by and modeled on the cross.

When I ask students in preaching class what makes our Christian faith distinctive, I often get the answer, Love. Okay? Love? Like...? “You know, loving the neighbor.” And then I ask, when is the last time you spoke to a Jewish rabbi, your muslim neighbors, your agnostic friends? Next time you do, ask them what their core values are...chances are good one will be, love. More specifically, loving the neighbor. We Christians do not have the market on loving the neighbor, either theoretically or concretely. It’s a commandment that existed long before the baby Jesus was born in Bethlahem.

But now that the baby Jesus has been born in Bethlahem, now that he has been crucified, now that he has risen, we can say that we have the market on a certain kind of love;

A “foot-washing” kind of love.

An “I’ll meet you at the well” kind of love

A “my reputation will be at stake but you’re worth it” kind of love.

A “you might betray me or deny me twice even three times and I will still die for you” kind of love.

“Love one another in this way,” Jesus says, “just as I have loved you.”

Now that is new. It is this kind of love that shows that we are followers of Christ and glorifies God.

Now remember, at the meal just before Passover, Jesus is talking to his most faithful followers. Certainly this is not to suggest that those who are not followers are to be ignored. By no means.

But in this moment, Jesus sees fit to address the inner circle. It's one of those "kitchen table moments" as Pastor Bouman alluded to. The intimacy and significance are evident. It's time for a heart-to-heart talk within the household of faith.

Still today, Jesus sees fit to gather those, "who have given the power to become children of God" on order to say, "Little children, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

It is not an exhortative, (finger pointing) "I command you." But...(hands giving), "I give you a new commandment." What a gift it is to be entrusted with such an important task. And it is good news that Jesus does not say we become his own by loving one another. Rather, loving one another is a response to Jesus, already making us his own.

"By loving one another, everyone will know you are my disciples."

There's another question for your friends who are not self-proclaimed followers of Jesus. What do you see when you look at the Christian church?

I've wondered what would it be like if we could put the whole church in one of those little snow globes. [Do you Floridians know what I mean by snow globes? Maybe you have sunshine globes here. You shake it up and the temperature goes up in 10 degree increments. Shake it more and uff-.] Whatever kind of globe it is, let's say you could put the whole church, all that that encompasses, in it so that you can pick it up every once in a while and peek in. What would you see? Storms? Yes. The intensity of the heat rising? Sometimes. Would you love seeing one another as Jesus loves? Yes. Praise be to God for that.

Why would that not always be the case? That is, why might there be times when you peek that you would not see a love for one another as Jesus loves? It's not coincidental that right before

Jesus gives the new commandment, there is the foretelling of betrayal, Judas, and right after, the foretelling of denial, Peter. Loving one another as Jesus loves us is not a given—it's not easy.

Peter discovers that one of the things gets in the way of loving one another, is that what we think is the inner circle (hold up small circle), the family of God, “one another,” is smaller [hold up small circle] than God's perspective of the inner circle (widen the circle).

You heard the story. Stunning. Here is the fledgling church trying to get going a generation after Jesus' death and resurrection. How important is it that everyone know they are disciples of Jesus. [TELL THE STORY] – It seems that Peter would tell the story again and again, step by step. He has to...because the Judean believers (hold up small circle) could not believe that the (begin opening up) “gentiles has accepted the word of God” [(larger circle suggesting God's perspective from earlier)] “Why did you even go to them,” they ask. Even more, “why did you eat with them?” It seems that Peter didn't go without a little bit of resistance. In his vision he heard a voice, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat.” Knowing the custom, Peter responds, “By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.” The voice answered, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” A new commandment.

This happened to Peter three times. After he heard the voice the third time in his vision, three men from Caesarea summoned him. You see there was a centurion in Caesarea named Cornelius. Cornelius was already a devout man who, with his household, feared God. A little before Peter's vision, Cornelius too had a vision that stirred him to send for Peter.

When Cornelius' men summoned Peter, the Spirit told him to go and (slow) not to make a distinction between them and us. And so he went. While Peter preached to them all about who Jesus is all that Jesus had done, in the middle of this sermon in fact, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them.

After Peter recounted this story to his naysayers, those who inquired why Peter would even bother with such people, he said, “If God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then (slow) who was I that I could hinder God?”

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have this kind of love for one another.

Peter had learned and lived the “my reputation will be at stake but you’re worth it” kind of love.

The ‘how to be together’ was suddenly expanded to ‘with whom to be together.’ When Peter’s vision and Cornelius’ vision came together, many discovered God’s vision!

“What power do WE have to stand in the way of God?” None. God’s vision will be fulfilled.

How humbling it is that God desires that we be a part of that vision.

In these days of hearing about “Together in Mission” I see this synod attending to the how and the with whom of Jesus’ new commandment for the sake of God’s vision of the world. The how is the vision of the local congregation or group of congregations uniting with another part of the synod to figure out how to love one another as Jesus loves. Indeed, it’s time for that

“footwashing” kind of love, it’s time for that “eating with those with whom I disagree” kind of love.

I also see in “Together In Mission” an expansion of the inner circle, that is, living into God’s view of the inner circle.

\*The time is right to strengthen your companionship between your congregations and the communities around you.

\*The time is right to strengthen the companionship between this synod and our brothers and sisters in Haiti.

We make no distinction between them and us for they are us – we are them. Jesus gathers all of us around the table and says Little Children, as I love you, love one another. This new commandment is a gift-it is an opportunity to glorify God together.

Love one another. You should know this phrase in Greek. For more reasons than it's cool. But it is that. Agapate allelous. You can hear it in "Agapate" the word agape, which you know – love. "One another" is "Allelous" – what word does that sound like? (song) Allelous Allelous Allelous Hallelujah. Yes. When we love one another, hallelujah, God is praised. And God is worthy to be praised. God, the one who claims us despite our foibles – even despite our successes, which, indeed have the potential to take out focus away from God; God, the one who wipes away every tear, who quenches our thirst with water from the springs of the waters of life, who makes all things new. God, the alpha and the omega, is worthy to be praised by us and all creation. (Rev. and Psalm 148)

So that God might be glorified, as Jesus loves you, agapate allelous. I know that it takes hearing something 6xs (preferably in different ways) before the message sinks in. So join me in repeating that Greek phrase, As Jesus loves you, agapate allelous. That was two. Can you folks on this side of the room remind those on this side? As Jesus loves you, \_\_\_\_\_ That's three. How about this side? As Jesus loves you, \_\_\_\_\_ That's four. Can you remind me? As Jesus loves you, \_\_\_\_\_ That's five.

And for the sixth we turn to the cross which says it all—beyond words. Agapate allelous. Hallelujah.

**Sermon 8: The Reverend Shauna Hannan 18 September 2008**  
**Written for Holy Cross Day (no title) John 3:13-17**

Grace to you and peace from the crucified and risen one, Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.



What you are about to hear may not make sense. It may be offensive, scandalous even. I'll give you the abbreviated version. Incarnate Divinity. Crucified Lord. Saving Cross.

If only the plural of paradox were paradise.

Soon we will participate in an ecclesiastical paradox at this table where we will partake together the simplest of meals with lavish significance. But first we have a moment to reflect on the paradoxical holy cross.

Holy Cross Day has been celebrated in the Western Church since the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. This feast day began in Jerusalem in the year 400, nearly a century after the alleged discovery by Emperor Constantine's mother of the actual cross on which Jesus was crucified. A seminary professor of mine has told the legendary story that deacons would guard this cross in order to make sure that pilgrims who desired to "kiss the cross would not bite a splinter out of it and take it home with them." As he put it, "One scarcely knows what is more wondrous, or pathetic, (perhaps a little of both), the pilgrim who wanted a bite out of the cross, or a church that stood guard to make sure they didn't get it." Such domestication of the cross has dire consequences indeed.

Though we are not likely to need a wood chip from the original cross, we as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians do hold dear this paradoxical symbol of death and life. Holy Cross Day gives us an opportunity to contemplate its glory apart from the somberness of Lent. For that I am grateful. When I was about 9 years old (which isn't that accurate because I seem to remember everything happening when I was 9) it occurred to me that a pre-requisite for being Christian was being miserable. Only those who hated life, despaired endlessly are true Christians. Some might say that the Lutheran church I attended was doing its job. But it kind of backfired, you know. Here I was an energetic, grateful, well-loved young gal who one day decided she would show her true

Christian spirit by moping, donning a dour face, reveling in telling others about my shortcomings and failures. I had made it: thank God I am finally miserable. Yes! I was so serious that I probably put at the top of my Christmas list...misery. 9 yrs. Old...or so.

You know what tripped me up...the cross; somehow I had heard that I was required to shape my life to meet the misery/torture it represents. I was using every single morsel of wisdom I could muster in order to figure out how to interpret the event of crucifixion and shape my life accordingly. In some strange, subtle way this is a theology of glory. And this kind of thinking needed the reminder that the cross is foolishness to the wise. I was heartbroken when I realized that such a life of languish was not for me and was resigned to thinking that I couldn't be a "true" Christian.

This example of a misunderstanding of the cross is not at all as potentially devastating as others. For example, when people interrupt the cross in such a way that it justifies the violent abuse inflicted upon others, the results are disastrous. Or, when people use the cross to justify the violent abuse being inflicted upon them. The kind of domestication of the cross (that is, not taking a splinter of it home to set on your mantle, but claiming that it is your own to wield power over others); this kind of domestication of the cross which leads to rationalization of abuse or exclusion, is not representative of what stands behind and in front of this symbol. The power of the saving cross of Jesus Christ heals, invigorates, liberates. God did not send Jesus to condemn the world, but to save it.

Saving cross. How could that be? If we try to interpret the cross using the wisdom of the world, according to Paul, such wisdom will be destroyed, such discernment will be thwarted. At some point our wise interpretation of the cross meets a dead end and we finally realize that it is the cross that interprets us. There is a difference.

Rather than accepting abuse inflicted upon us, abuse of any kind that wounds, diminishes, denies us; rather than accepting such abuse as “our cross to bear,” the power of the cross assures us that we are beloved children of God; so beloved that God was willing to die for us.

Rather than making ourselves miserable in order to mirror the tragic events of the cross and thus become more deserving of its gifts, the power of the cross assures that in our miserable moments God desires for us joy and wholeness and that our deserving does not play a role in God’s choice to shower gifts of grace and mercy on us.

The cross does not even require us to prove to the world or God our unworthiness to receive God’s benefits. In some perverted way, such acts are meant to elevate ourselves. Rather, it is the elevated God on this tree that proves something to us about who God is and how God is with and for us.

The cross interprets us.

The message of the cross, as Paul’s letter to the Corinthians suggests, is senseless to the wise world. It would be easier to try to “find” God elsewhere. But today we are reminded that God is “indispensably revealed in the crucified one” (Sally Brown).

It’s not only the content of the message, but its function that seems senseless. Recall Paul’s words, “God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation [Notice it does not say through foolish proclamation], through the foolishness of our proclamation God decided to save those who believe.” This high function of the word is a stumbling block to many. But to you who believe, upon hearing that God has sent God’s son for you, to die on the cross for you, this message is the power of God. Hear it. Believe it. And live.

Incarnate Divinity, Crucified Lord, Saving cross. Heap paradox upon paradox upon paradox like that and you get unbounded grace, endless mercy and an arm-stretching embrace wide enough to save the whole world.

That is paradise.

AMEN.

**Sermon 9: The Reverend Wanda Neely, Micah 5: 2-5a, Philippians 2:5-11 “When Christmas Comes for Everyone”, December 20, 2009**

Introduction:

When I realized my work of helping the church build program and staff was finished and I needed to step down, I put myself on sabbatical leave. And then this fall I began a temporary position in chaplaincy at Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

In addition to addressing routine pastoral needs of patients, the chaplain on call in the hospital answers all codes, all traumas and is present at most withdrawals of life support. Furthermore, if you are the on-call chaplain on a Sunday, you are in charge of leading the service in the chapel.

That was the case for me a couple of Sundays ago. It was the second Sunday of Advent, so I wanted to light candles in worship. But it is a hospital; no open flames. I did not want to be known as the chaplain who caused a Code Red in the chapel on a Sunday morning.

So instead of lighting candles, I took four of those individual electric candles you put in windows and lined them up at the front of the chapel. At the beginning of the service, I turned on two of the lights. It was not the way candles are supposed to be lit in worship during Advent. But it was the way it needed to be; the way it had to be.

For most of the patients there and their families that is how this season has gone. I wonder if that is how the season is going for you as well. Not the way you think it is “supposed” to be. But the way it needs to be; the way it has to be.

I.

This week as we finish Advent and celebrate Christmas we have an interesting mix of hymns. We opened with an advent hymn written in 1744 by John Wesley. For the New Testament lesson we read what was likely a hymn developed during the first century of the early church. Later we will hear and sing hymns written or arranged during our lifetime. On Christmas Eve, we will sing what we call traditional hymns, “*Silent Night*,” “*Joy to the World*.”

We are part of a song that began long before we arrived and will continue long after we are gone. And at no time in the development of any version of that song were things ever as people thought they were supposed to be.

That is how Christmas comes, not as we expect.

The Son of God among us as a tiny baby?

Born in a stable to a poor family of no social standing?

The birth announcement delivered by angels to lowly shepherds in a

field? That’s not the way it was supposed to be.

The Son of God giving up divine privileges and becoming like a slave,

obedient even unto death on a cross?

Not the way we would have thought it would be. But the way it needed to be; the way it had to be.

And you are a church who gets that.

II. In the little book *The Good News from North Haven*, Michael Lindvall describes a year in the life of a fictional Presbyterian church in a small town. The last chapter of the book is called “Christmas Baptism.”

One Sunday in November Reverend David, the pastor of the church, was approached by longtime member, pillar of the congregation, elder for life Angus McDowell. Angus said he wanted to have his grandson baptized in worship Thanksgiving weekend when his son and daughter-in-law would be bringing him from Spokane.

The pastor cringed. This was not the way baptism was supposed to be done in a Presbyterian Church. He asked did the son and daughter-in-law have a church affiliation in Spokane? Because that is really what is best for the child, to be baptized, in the church where he will be raised. At the baptism the parents are asked to make some rather sweeping and deep commitments.

Well, Angus said, they have not found a church there yet, even though they have lived there nine years. The pastor explained that the son and daughter-in-law in Spokane should find a church home where they live and have the baby baptized there. That’s the way it should be.

Angus the elder listened. And then he left the pastor’s office and called the elders to come to a Session meeting so they could approve the baptism of his grandson for the Sunday after Thanksgiving. So the baptism of baby Angus Larry was scheduled for that weekend, which was also the first Sunday in Advent. It was not the way it was supposed to be done, according to the *Book of Order*, but the way it would be done.

Now like in our church, that congregation had the custom of asking who was present to stand with the child for baptism. And the extended family of the little one would rise. So, with

the parents and little Angus Larry at the font, Pastor David asked the question, “Who stands with this child?” Up stood proud Angus and his wife Minnie, and their daughter-in-law’s parents who had driven in for the occasion, along with a couple of cousins. The questions of commitment were asked, and little Angus Larry was baptized.

After worship, everyone rushed home to turkey leftovers, and Pastor David went back into the sanctuary to gather up his papers. There sitting in the front pew was a middle-aged woman, dressed very simply, purse in her lap. The pastor recognized her as someone who usually sat in the very last pew in worship, as close to a door as possible. He did not know her name.

The woman seemed at a loss for words, but finally she said her name was Mildred Cory and commented as to how lovely the baptism was. After a long pause, she said that her daughter, Tina, had just had a baby and, well, the baby needed to be baptized, didn’t he?

David suggested that Tina and her husband call him, and they would discuss the baptism. The woman hesitated and then said, “Tina’s got no husband; Tina’s just eighteen. She was confirmed here at church four years ago. She used to come to the Senior High group, but then she started to see this older boy out of high school.”

The woman hesitated for a moment, gathered her courage, and continued. “Then she got pregnant and decided to keep the baby. She named him James; calls him Jimmy. The father’s gone. And she wants to have him baptized here in her church. But she’s nervous to come and talk with you.” The pastor said he would take the request to the Session for approval.

When the matter came before the Session, there were a few questions from the elders as to whether they could be certain that Tina would stick to the commitment she was making in having her baby baptized. Pastor David remarked that she and little Jimmy were, after all, right

there in town where the church could give them support. He did not have to say, “not in Spokane, like some babies we baptize.” They got it.

The real problem was the picture of the baptism that they all had in their heads: Young Tina with little Jimmy in her arms and Mildred Cory, the only one who would stand when the question was asked. It hurt to think of it, but the baptism was scheduled for the last Sunday in Advent.

The church was full that day, as it always is the Sunday before Christmas. After the sermon, the elder who was to assist in the baptism stood up beside the pastor at the font and read the words, “On behalf of the Session, I present Tina Cory who brings her son James for the sacrament of baptism.”

Down the aisle Tina came, nervously, briskly, with month-old Jimmy in her arms, a blue pacifier in his mouth. The scene hurt every bit as much as they all knew it would. So young this mother was and so alone. One could not help but think of another baby boy born long ago to a young mother in difficult circumstances.

Pastor David shared words about the sacrament of baptism. And then he asked the question, “Who stands with this child?” He nodded at Mildred to coax her to her feet. She rose slowly.

The pastor was just about to ask Tina the parents’ questions of commitment when he became aware of movement in the pews. He looked up and saw it happen. Angus McDowell stood up, and then Minnie stood up beside him. Then a couple of other elders stood, then the middle school Sunday school teacher stood, then a new young couple in church, and soon, before the pastor’s eyes, the whole church was standing with little Jimmy.



Tina was crying, and Mildred Cory was holding on for dear life to the pew in front of her. And every eye in the sanctuary was on the child, who was for that moment everybody's baby. (1)

Two babies entered that church family that Advent. Neither the way they were "supposed to"; both the way they needed to.

Conclusion:

We come to the end of a year in which things have happened for most of us that we did not want to happen, were not supposed to happen, but they did.

And that is where Christmas will come.

And enter our lives not the way we think it is "supposed to," but the way it needs to; the way it has to.

Bringing a message: God is here.

Right here in middle of it all, making it work.

May Christmas come to you this week. Amen. (2)

Notes:

1. Michael L. Lindvall, *The Good News from North Haven: A Year in the Life of a Small Town*. New York: Pocket Books, 1991, pages 168-74.
2. This sermon, preached the Fourth Sunday of Advent 2009, was my "last chapter," delivered on my last Sunday at First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, NC. I had been called to the church as co-pastor to build program and staff. Those tasks had been completed, and I was stepping down from the position.

**Sermon10: The Reverend Wanda Neely, Psalm 139:7-10, Jonah 1:7-10 "Fleeing from the Presence of the Lord?" February 28, 2010**

Prayer for illumination: Lord, as we come again to your word, we ask that you open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as scripture is read and your Word is proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Introduction:

It is the second Sunday in Lent, the second of six Sundays and 40 days set aside for self-examination and prayer, to prepare us for the celebration of Easter.

In worship during Lent you are focusing on the book of Jonah. There are only 48 verses in Jonah, but in this little book we find an expansive vision of God and a remarkable story of calling, repentance and rebirth.

I invite you to take a pew Bible and turn to page 810 in the Old Testament section and follow along as I read.

A little background on where you are in the story . . . or as they would say on television, “previously in worship . . .”

If you were in one of the services for Ash Wednesday, you heard God’s call to Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. Only Jonah said, *“Anywhere, Lord but Nineveh”* and boarded a ship headed in the opposite direction to a place called Tarshish. It would be like God telling me to go to South Carolina to preach but when I got to Interstate 95, instead I turned my car north and headed toward Virginia saying, “Anywhere Lord, anywhere but South Carolina.”

Then last Sunday you heard how God hurled a great wind upon the seas, and the ship on which Jonah was traveling began to sink. The captain, finding Jonah asleep in the bottom of the ship, said, “Get up on deck and call on your God to see if your God will save us.”

Now today we continue on the journey with Jonah,  
in a storm, on a sinking ship

headed in the wrong direction.

Jonah 1:7-10. Listen for the Word of God. [Read text]

May the Lord add rich blessings to the reading of the Word.

The Word of the Lord            Thanks be to God.

I.        William Carl, president of our Presbyterian seminary in Pittsburgh, says that Jonah is his kind of missionary: reluctant, withdrawn, stubborn. Never quite ready to go where God is calling him. (1)

All over the Old Testament, people are getting up and following God's call. But not Jonah. Abraham and Sarah move out on a promise and a prayer. Moses heads for Egypt with nothing but a shepherd's crook and Aaron to write his sermons. David goes up against the giant Goliath with only a slingshot and five pebbles from a brook. Elijah stands defiant, facing alone four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal.

But not Jonah. Jonah gets on a ship and heads in the opposite direction from where God is calling him.

Jonah has good reason to run. The Ninevites are the enemy. Will Rogers said he never met a man he didn't like, but Will Rogers never met a Ninevite.

The Ninevites committed the Holocaust of the Old Testament. The Ninevites destroyed Jonah's family. Jonah comes out of the Dachau and Auschwitz of his day, and God says, *"I want you to go preach my word to Nineveh."* And Jonah says, *"Anywhere, Lord, anywhere but Nineveh."*

So he flees . . . from Ninevah . . . and from the Lord.

II. Jonah thinks that God is like cell phone service; that if you get far enough away the call will drop. But as the psalmist says so eloquently in today's first reading, you cannot out distance God.

"Where can I go from your spirit . . .

If I ascend to heaven;

if I make my bed in Sheol (that is the abyss of the grave);

if I go to the farthest limits of the sea,

behold God, you are there." (2)

In the storm, the crew tries everything to keep the ship afloat. Cargo is thrown overboard, prayers are attempted to any and all deities. Nothing works.

There's an interesting bit of satire at work here. The word for "sailors" in the Hebrew here is a derivative of the word for "salt," while Jonah in Hebrew means "dove." So these salty dog sailors have this bird, dare I say chicken? of a passenger on the ship with them putting their lives in jeopardy.

Now the sailors have the understanding of the day of multiple gods, most of which are apathetic if not hostile to humans, more to be feared than respected, certainly not loved. Crossing a god meant signing your own death warrant. Make a god angry, and a 7 or 8.8 magnitude earthquake will strike your land.

But the storyteller knows better, and we know better. Jonah's is the one true God, Creator of the heavens, the seas and the dry land. A loving God of mercy and forgiveness.

Over in the New Testament in Acts chapter 14 when Paul and Barnabas enter the city of Lystra, and are mistaken as the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury, they, say

. . . “turn from these vain things, unto the living God, who made the heaven, the earth and the sea, and all in them.” (3)

Three chapters later, Paul is in Athens, standing before the philosophers, and he starts off the same way saying, The God that made the world and all things therein, the Lord of heaven and earth. This is the God we proclaim. (4)

Keep reading in Jonah and you see that when Jonah allows himself to be thrown overboard in an effort to save the others, he does not experience divine retribution. Instead, he undergoes the groanings and pain of rebirth.

III. Francis Thompson at one time intended to be a priest, but he was deemed unqualified. Then he turned to his father's medical profession but failed again. Angry and bitter, he gave up on God.

For three years (from 1885-1888), Thompson lived the life of a derelict on the streets of London, suffering the agony of an opium habit. Finally some friends did an intervention, snatched him from the abyss of death and brought him to the God he had dreaded.

Thompson converted, and he wrote a poem about his running called “*The Hound of Heaven.*” Down the nights and down the days, down the arches of the years, down the labyrinthine ways, God like a bloodhound tracked me, Thompson says. God was always in the distance, sniffing my scent, occasionally letting out a howl, to remind me that my Maker was on my trail. (5)

The first step in finding and knowing God is admitting that you run from God. Take time this Lent to identify the ways in which you run. The second step is realizing no matter how much you run, the Creator of the heavens, the seas and the dry land, the Hound of Heaven, will find you.

Conclusion:

In the field behind the house where we lived in upstate South Carolina was a landing pad for emergency helicopters that came to our little town from busy Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte. The landing pad was just a simple concrete slab.

Whenever a helicopter was coming, the town's three EMS trucks, a couple of police cars and some volunteers would come and surround the field with their vehicles. They would shine their lights on the pad, so the pilot could see where to land.

Off in the distance we would hear the faint sound of a helicopter. It would get louder and louder, until the windows on our house started rattling and the leaves started blowing off the trees. And then down would swoop a med-o-vac helicopter over the roof of our house, lowering itself onto that little slab of concrete.

Then EMS would carry someone, clinging to life, out of one of the trucks and onto the helicopter. The helicopter would lift straight up, turn into the night, and head toward Charlotte and the hope of healing and life.

I never understood how a pilot could leave the bright lights of a big city and find that little patch of concrete in my backyard with just headlights shining on it.

This Lent:

Whether you turn on the lights or not, God will find you.

Whether you acknowledge God or not, God will be with you.

No matter how hard you try not to listen

No matter how much you pretend not to understand,

No matter how far you try to run, God will find you.

This is our story. We are Jonah.

We run pretending to ourselves and others that we are pursuing God, but really we run because we believe we can out run God.

Only to discover in a storm, that God has been with us all along, lovingly, relentlessly, doggedly, pursuing us.

One of the hospital chaplains said this week, “I used to pray that I could take God into a patient’s room, and say, ‘Look, God has found you in your crisis.’ Then I realized I don’t take God into that room. God arrives in the room long before I do.” “Now,” she said, “I pray that in that room God will find me.”

This Lent, wherever you are running, whether it is toward something or away from something, stop and let God find you. Amen.

Notes:

1. William Carl, III, “Tickets for Tarshish,” November 9, 2008, Day 1 Radio website, [http://day1.org/1118-tickets\\_for\\_tarshish](http://day1.org/1118-tickets_for_tarshish).
2. Psalm 139:7-10
3. Acts 14:15
4. Acts 17:24
5. Rowland Croucher and others, “Running from God?” January 5, 2003, a devotion from John Mark Ministries website, <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/3232.htm>.

## APPENDIX B: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

### **Sermon 1: The Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, “The Path is Plain” John 3:14,15 September 30, 1877**

#### I. Building task #1-building significance

##### A. Situated meanings

1. Place names and geographical terms with biblical connotations: Egypt, Mount Hor, Red Sea, Edom, wilderness.
2. Common nouns naming objects or concepts from the Bible: cross, yoke, Seraphim, serpent.
3. Time: a period of wandering of the Hebrews in the wilderness.
4. People: Moses; the Hebrew people; the reader and/or listener of the sermon; God; Lucan, the Roman poet; Dr. Doddridge, a Congregational minister.

##### B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: St. John 3:14,14; Isaiah 6:2; Hebrews 1:7; Exodus.
2. A poem by Roman poet Lucan.
3. A story about a man who had a dream and was saved by God.
4. A verse from a hymn by Dr. Doddridge.

##### C. Discourse models

1. Christian premise of crucifixion.
2. Christian belief in eternal life for believers.
3. Christian recognition that all are sinners.
4. Christian idea of faith.



## II. Building task #2-building activities

### Activity

1. Primary: the preachers preaching a sermon.
2. Secondary: preacher utilizing texts listed above in section I.B.

### A. Action

#### 1. Preaching.

a. Actions described within the sermon: Hebrews journeying from Mount Hor by way of Red Sea to Edom; Hebrews speaking against the Lord; Moses prays for the people; serpents sent by God as punishment; poison from serpent's bite causes victim to lose reasoning powers; brass serpent lifted into pole; victim can look at brass serpent and live; Christ saves sinners; man dreams he is falling and then saved.

## III. Building task #3-building identities

### A. Identity.

1. Shaw as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Shaw as educated person, quoting from a poem by Roman poet Lucan; Shaw as social being quoting a dream narrative presumably told to her by an anonymous person; Shaw as church-oriented person, quoting from a hymn; Shaw as a teacher.
2. Moses as the leader of Hebrew people; Moses as the one who has the ear of God.
3. Lucan as poet worthy of being quoted in sermon.
4. Sinners, as constructed through the words of the sermon.

5. Jesus Christ as savior but also as punisher.
6. The man who had the dream. He discovers what faith really means.

IV. Building task #4-building relationships

A. Relationship

1. Primary: Anna Howard Shaw, as preacher, with hearers and readers of her words; use of personal pronouns to include listeners/readers.
2. Secondary (described within the sermon): Moses is more powerful than the Hebrew people he leads; God as the most powerful; the man in the dream obeying the figure in white.

V. Building task #5-building politics

A. Social goods.

1. Knowledge:(of the preacher.
2. Gender: of Shaw as a female preachers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, works toward getting license to preach; of her outside sources, all written by men.
3. Power: of God over Moses and Hebrews, and man in the dream.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Shaw connects past (biblical accounts of Moses and the Hebrews in the wilderness), present (the relevance of the biblical scripture to our lives, sin and obedience to the will of God), future (eternal life with God in heaven); Shaw connects the time of the Hebrews, of Lucan, Roman (AD), of Dr. Doddridge (18<sup>th</sup> century), and her sermon (19<sup>th</sup> century).

2. Textual: between ancient biblical scriptures, Lucan's poem, Dr. Doddridge's hymn, the narrative of the dream, and her sermon.
3. Conceptual: between the Hebrews being cured by looking at the serpent on the pole to Jesus Christ being crucified on the cross.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, the Bible, the poem, the hymn.

**Sermon 2: Lucretia Mott: "The Truth of God...The Righteousness of God"  
September 23, 1841**

I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings.

1. Church-related terms: salvation, creed, high apostolic authority, this volume (Bible), servant, minister, monopoly of the pulpit, fruits of righteousness, brethren, faithful obedience, pulpit.
2. Proper names from the Bible: Paul, Corinth, Samantha, Huldah, Hebrew, Deborah, Israel, Joel.
3. Secular terms: man, as pronoun choice; fellow-beings, to refer to all human beings; sectarian predilections, Quaker tenets, woman, to refer to females in 1841 when sermon delivered; prejudices, to refer to feelings against women in the public sphere and in church pulpits; sisters, to refer to women in 19<sup>th</sup> century fighting for equal rights; plaything, frivolous appendages, and Ladies' Department, to refer to Mott's view of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

4. Time: Suffrage Movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century; Anti-slavery movement; Temperance.

B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: Paul's Letter to the Corinthians; words of Joel; instances of women in power depicted in church history (sources not given).

C. Discourse models

1. Societal restrictions against women in the public sphere.
2. Woman's Rights Movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century.
3. Paul's words as argument against women in church.
4. Words of Joel (sons and daughters shall prophesy).

II. Building task #2-building activities

A. Activity.

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon. Secondary: preachers utilizing texts listed above in section I.B.

B. Action

1. Preaching.
  - a. Mott counters objections to women preaching from a pulpit; Mott encourages listeners to carry out God's righteous will.
  - b. Actions described within the sermon: women rising up and occupying public sphere; dissatisfied with domestic duty; appeals made for suffering slaves.

III. Building task #3-building identities

A. Identity

1. Mott as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture and church history; Mott as advocate for women's rights, abolition of slavery, temperance; Mott as social being mentioning the evangelist with four daughters.
2. Women moving from domestic to public sphere.
3. Readers/listeners as people who can bring about change.

#### IV. Building task #4-building relationships

##### A. Relationship

1. Primary: Lucretia Mott as preacher, with listeners and readers of her words (tone is authoritative, but use of personal pronouns indicates her desire to include congregation in sermon); Mott as subordinate to listeners on behalf of women.
2. Secondary (described within sermon): Paul's words in his Letter to Corinthians having power over women in the church; words of Joel allowing women power in the church.

#### V. Building task #5-building politics

##### A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of the preacher.
2. Gender: of Mott as a female preacher in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Quaker, but not ordained).
3. Power: of Paul through words in Letter to the Corinthians, of women when they move from domestic realm to public sphere, of congregation when they become involved in reform.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Mott connects past (Biblical accounts of Paul's Letter to Corinthians instructing women to be silent in church), present (sermon being preached arguing against idea that women should not be allowed to preach), future (Mott's hope that women will have a place in public sphere and reform against slavery and drinking will be successful).
2. Textual: between Paul's letter, to Joel's words, to God's words, to record of unnamed evangelist, to women in Bible in positions of authority.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, the Bible.

**Sermon 3: The Reverend Melissa Frazier, "God's Favorite Child" Luke 15:11-32, January 10, 2010**

I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings

1. Church-related terms: spiritual age, a distant country, son, Prodigal son, journeying on, final destination on our journey, home.
2. Proper names from Bible: Luke, He and His (refers to God).
3. Secular terms: brothers and sisters, friends.

B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: St. Luke 15:11-32.

2. Personal story by preacher.
3. A book titled *Literary –Cultural Approach to Parables*.
4. A book by Henry Nouwen: *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.
5. A book by Elizabeth Gilbert: *Eat, Pray, Love*.

C. Discourse models

1. Role of parent and role of child.
2. Belief that we can go home again and be welcomed.
3. People trying to look younger than their age-expectations of society.

II. Building task #2-building activities

A. Activity

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon. Secondary: preacher utilizing texts listed above in section I.B.

B. Action

1. Preaching.
  - a. Actions described within the sermon: eating in restaurant with father, brother and roommate, waitress mistaking her for someone younger; youngest son asking father for his share of estate, leaving home, spending all the money, coming back home, father welcomes him home; oldest son resenting the youngest son; readers/listeners joining preacher on journey through sermon; father in chicken story replacing dead chicken in the night so flock will not reject new chicken.

III. Building task #3-building identities

A. Identity

1. Frazier as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Frazier as storyteller; Frazier as college student.
2. Waitress as someone who mistakes Frazier's age.
3. Youngest son as rule breaker but welcomed home and forgiven.
4. Oldest son as resentful and jealous.
5. Father of Prodigal son as forgiver.
6. God as ultimate Father.
7. Listeners/readers as brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### IV. Building task #4-building relationships

##### A. Relationship

1. Primary: Frazier, as preacher, with listeners and readers of her words.  
Addresses congregation as "friends" and uses inclusive pronouns.
2. Secondary (described within the sermon): Father of Prodigal son has power to give son money and then to welcome him home and forgive him; oldest son has power of resentment towards younger son; father in story by Gilbert has power to replace chicken in the night to fool other chickens.

#### V. Building task #5-building politics

##### A. Social goods

1. Knowledge (of the preacher, of the father of Prodigal son, of God).
2. Age, of preacher when mistaken for being younger than she was.
3. Power, of father of Prodigal son who has estate and money; of Prodigal son who asks for and receives his share of estate; of Prodigal son to hurt father by asking for money; of Father to welcome youngest son home, forgiving all.



4. Gender, of father and two sons. No women in story.
5. Joy, of father upon son's return.
6. Commitment to God, by listeners and readers who believe what God says.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Frazier connects her own experience when starting college to her sermon theme which revolves around each person's spiritual journey; youngest son leaves home, loses everything, comes back home.
2. Textual: between personal story and sermon theme, book titled *Literary-Cultural Approach to Parables*, book by Henry Nouwen, and the book by Elizabeth Gilbert.
3. Conceptual: between journey of three characters in story of Prodigal son to listeners and readers' journey in faith.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, the Bible, the books. Some speech involved with words of waitress, Frazier's father, complaints of oldest son in story, and God's voice.

**Sermon 4: The Reverend Melissa Frazier, "What Do You Need?" John 2:1-11, February 28, 2010**

I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings.

1. Bible-related terms: wedding, embarrassment, wine, hero, burning bush, parted sea, miracles, Lamb of God, Prince of Peace, stable in Bethlehem, muddy Jordan River, bloody cross of Golgotha, chief steward, bath water, leftover.
2. Proper names from Bible: Mary, Jesus, Him (Jesus), Cana.
3. Time: wedding as weeklong celebration in Old and New Testament

#### B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: John 2; 1-11; quote from Mary.
2. Quote from Leon Morris.
3. Quote from movie “Apollo 13.”
4. Preacher’s personal story.

#### C. Discourse model

1. Weddings-today and in Old and New Testament times.
2. Miracle at wedding of Cana.
3. Expectations that prayers will be answered.
4. Miracles.

### II. Building task-building activities

#### A. Activity

1. Primary: the preacher is preaching a sermon. Secondary: preacher utilizes texts listed above in section I.B.

#### B. Action

1. Preaching.

- a. Actions described within the sermon: preacher at friend's wedding washing dishes, Mary telling Jesus they've run out of wine, Jesus telling servants to fill stone jars with water and take them to head steward, servants follow directions, water turned into wine, preacher telling congregation to ask God for what we need and expect that God will answer.

### III. Building task #3-building identities

#### A. Identity

1. Frazier as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Frazier as teacher and interpreter of Gospel story; Frazier as friend in college averting wedding disaster; Frazier as social being relating personal story.
2. Jesus as teacher, miracle worker and problem solver.
3. Mary as mother of Jesus, recognizes his ability, is helper at wedding and asks Jesus for help.
4. Servants as followers of Jesus' instructions.
5. Head steward witnesses a miracle.
6. Bridegroom responsible for food and beverage for guests.
7. Listeners/readers believe in miracle at wedding in Cana.

### IV. Building task #4-building relationships

#### A. Relationship

1. Primary: Melissa Frazier, as preacher, with listeners and readers of her words. Uses inclusive pronouns to establish relationship with congregation.

2. Secondary (described within the sermon): preacher as problem-solver at friend's wedding, more powerful than caterer; Mary is serving at wedding, but also asks Jesus (son) for help; Jesus listens to Mary; Mary as mother of Jesus; Jesus is more powerful than guests and servants; preacher has power over listeners/readers.

V. Building task-building politics

A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of the preacher.
2. Gender: of Jesus, of bridegroom, of head steward.
3. Power: of preacher as friend in personal story who saved wedding reception from disaster; of Jesus who performs miracle at wedding in Cana; Jesus over servants; Mary, mother of Jesus who asks him for help; of bridegroom as host of wedding; of wedding guests who can sue for not having enough wine; head steward for serving wine; readers and listeners now have knowledge to ask God for what we need and wait for answer.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Frazier connects past (wedding story in Gospel), present (personal story of college experience); Frazier connects first miracle of turning water into wine at wedding at Cana to later miracles recounted in Bible; Frazier connects the idea that listeners and readers must make God aware of our needs, then expect and trust that God will answer, and finally we must work while we wait for an answer.

3. Textual: between personal story of preacher and biblical scripture and preacher's sermon, between sermon and quote from Leon Morris' between movie "Apollo 13" to sermon.

VII. Building task #7- building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, the Bible, book by Leon Morris.

**Sermon 5: The Reverend Lucy Lind Hogan, "Important Nobodies" Proper 27B November 8, 2009**

I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings

1. Place names and locations with biblical connotations: Bethlehem, Temple courtyard, Ur, Nazareth, Moab, Israel.
2. Common nouns naming objects or concepts from the Bible: registered, mite, rabbi, scribe or Pharisees, shepherd, prophet, Mara-bitter, Mite box.
3. People: Peter, Brian Voltaggio, Naomi, Ruth, unnamed widow, King David, Jesus, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, David, Amos, Mary, James, John, God, Orpah, Boaz, Obed, Jesse.
4. Time: Lenten season, afternoon in courtyard of Temple.
5. Secular terms: nobody, Tasting Room, Volt, Top Chef, grandson, woman, refugee.

B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: Psalms 146:8-9; Ruth 1:16; Samuel 1:6,7; Luke 2: 3,4; Mark 13:2.

### C. Discourse models

1. Christian religion.
2. Institution of church.
3. Celebrity status.

## II. Building task #2-building activities

### A. Activity

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon. Secondary: preacher utilizing Bible scripture listed above in section I.B.

### B. Action

1. Preaching.
  - a. Actions described within sermon: Jesus teaching disciples about what he feels is important (not having much money but giving all that you have); widow in courtyard of Temple donating two mites; Ruth marrying again, ending up as great, great, great... grandmother of Jesus; actions people take to be famous (losing weight on TV, eating bugs, cooking on “Top Chef”); Naomi and Ruth returning to Bethlehem; preacher explain that she became a grandmother recently; Jesus telling disciples to follow lead of widow in courtyard; people acting like celebrities; Brian Voltaggio becoming a star as a chef on a cooking show competition.

## III. Building task #3-building identities

### A. Identity

1. Hogan as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Hogan as grandmother relating to grandmother in sermon; Hogan as social being

making reference to people's desire to be famous ad two local restaurants, and one local celebrity.

2. Ruth as great, great, great...grandmother of Jesus.
3. Jesus as teacher, rabbi.
4. Peter's role as follower of Jesus.
5. Brian Voltaggio as "Top Chef" contestant and chef at local restaurant.
6. Disciples as followers of Jesus.
7. Boaz as husband of Ruth.
8. Listeners ad readers as "dear friends" as identified by preacher.
9. Unnamed widow in courtyard as example for disciples ad congregation.
10. Naomi as widow of Elimelech of Bethlehem.
11. Ruth as widow of Chilion.
12. David as youngest son of Abraham and Sarah.
13. Amos as shepherd and dresser of fig trees.
14. Mary as teenaged nobody from Nazareth.
15. Peter, James and John as fishermen.
16. Samuel as prophet.
17. Ruth and Boaz as parents of Obed who is father of Jesse who is father of David. Ruth as great, great grandmother of Joseph.

#### IV. Building task #4-building relationships

##### A. Relationship

1. Primary: Lucy Lind Hogan as preacher with listeners and readers of her words. Personal pronouns used to include those listening to or reading

sermon; Hogan as new grandmother relating to grandmother Ruth in sermon and Bible scripture ad to grandmothers in congregation.

2. Secondary (described within sermon): Jesus to Peter, James and John; Peter to widow (he feels superior); local celebrity to hometown and restaurant where he works; Ruth as Naomi's daughter-in-law; Ruth and Naomi as widows; unnamed widow in courtyard to disciples; Ruth to Jesus; Ruth to Boaz; Noah, Abraham, Sarah, David, Amos Mary, Peter, James , John to other "nobodies: in Bible scripture; women in certain parts of the world with no power compared to Ruth and Naomi.

V. Building task #5-building politics

A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of the preacher about Bible, local events, cotemporary examples of people trying to be famous.
2. Gender: of three women in Bible scripture; of women in certain parts of the world where they have no power; of unnamed widow in courtyard.
3. Power: of Jesus over disciples; of local celebrity; of people's bank accounts; of Ruth; of unnamed widow after Jesus uses her as an example.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Hogan connects past (Bible story of three women) and present (lives of listeners ad readers); Hogan connects the widow Ruth as the great...great grandmother of Jesus; Hogan connects women with no power in biblical scripture to women today in parts of the world; Hogan connects the



unnamed widow in courtyard donating two mites to her own childhood when she put money in a mite box during Lent.

2. Textual: between biblical scripture.
3. Conceptual: poor widow donating what she has to God loving us for giving all that we have spiritually.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, Bible scripture.

**Sermon #6: The Reverend Lucy Lind Hogan, “Matter of Death and Life” Proper 8B Mark 5:21-43; June 28, 2009**

I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings

1. Bible-related terms: singing angels, the adoring Kings bearing gifts, manger, stable, mother (refer to birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem); story of this life (and death and life again) to refer to the story of the resurrection; the church, suffered, unclean, unnamed woman, leper, paralytic, rabbi, pastor, daughter.
2. People: Mark, Mark’s good news, Mark’s gospel, Jairus, Jesus, Son of God, John the Baptist, Simon (Peter), Nicodemus, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Al, Mattie Stepanek, Professor Randi Pausch, Courtland Milloy.
3. Time: a period when Jairus’ daughter became sick and Jesus traveled to heal her; period when unnamed woman found Jesus and touched the hem of his robe and was healed; fourteen years of Mattie’s life; few days in life of preacher’s pastor friend.

4. Secular terms: we; quest; pushed; ran; showed; thrust away the blind; rushed ahead; threw himself; you; beautiful circle.

#### B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: Mark 5:21-43.
2. Book written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu titled *God Has a Dream; A Vision of Hope for Our Time*.
3. Article in *The Washington Post* by Courtland Milloy.
4. A poem by Mattie Stepanek.
5. Quotation from Mattie Stepanek.

#### C. Discourse models

1. Christian knowledge of Bible scripture.
2. Belief in miracles.
3. Christian concept of baptism.
4. Health care debate in Congress.

### II. Building task #2-building activities

#### A. Activity.

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon. Secondary: preacher utilizing tests listed above in section I.B.

#### B. Action

1. Preaching.
  - a. Actions described within the sermon: birth of Jesus and baptism by John the Baptist; crowds surrounding Jesus wherever he went as people brought their sick to make well; events preacher's best friend deals with regarding

death and life; story of Jairus, desperate to heal dying daughter and pleading with Jesus to make her well; unnamed woman bleeding for twelve years who touched the hem of Jesus' robe and was healed.

### III. Building task #3-building identities

#### A. Identity

1. Hogan as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Hogan as teacher; Hogan as educated person quoting from Archbishop Tutu's book, Courtland Milloy's newspaper article, Mattie Stepanek's webpage, and Mattie Stepanek's poem; Hogan as wife of dermatologist referencing the health care debate; Hogan as friend of pastor dealing with issues of death and life.
2. Jesus as healer, teacher (rabbi), and miracle worker.
3. Unnamed woman as desperate "nobody" who doesn't want to bother Jesus.
4. Jairus as ruler of synagogue and desperate father who wants Jesus to heal his daughter.
5. Preacher's female pastor friend as someone dealing with issues of death and life.
6. Mattie Stepanek as inspirational child.
7. Archbishop Desmond Tutu as someone worthy to be quoted.
8. Courtland Milloy as someone worthy to be quoted.
9. John the Baptist as baptizer of Jesus.
10. Daughter of Jairus as dying twelve-year-old girl.
11. Professor Randi Pausch as dying college professor who witnessed joy.
12. Preacher's friend Al who lost both legs but still raised his daughter.

IV. Building task #4-building relationships

A. Relationship

1. Primary: Lucy Lind Hogan as preacher, with listeners and readers of her words.
2. Secondary (described within the sermon): Jesus more powerful than Jairus, his daughter, the crowds, and the unnamed woman; preacher's best friend as pastor, counselor, priest and supporter of congregation members; preacher's power as wife of doctor; John the Baptist baptizes Jesus; Mattie Stepanek's influence even after death.

V. Building task #5-building politics

A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of the preacher; of the preacher's pastor friend; of Mattie Stepanek; of Archbishop Desmond Tutu; of Courtland Milloy; of Mark.
2. Gender: of preacher's best friend who is a female pastor, of outside sources who are men.
3. Power: of Jesus over Jairus, daughter of Jairus, crowds, and unnamed woman; John the Baptist who baptized Jesus; preacher's pastor friend with members of congregation; Mattie Stepanek over disease; of Jairus who pushed others out of way to get to Jesus; of preacher as doctor's wife to influence others to care about health care debate; of Professor Randi Pausch who found joy even when dying; of preacher's friend Al who lost both legs but still raised daughter; of unnamed woman who was healed by touching robe of Jesus.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Hogan connects past (matters of death and life in biblical times) to present (matters of death and life today).
2. Textual: between sermon and book written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, webpage and poem written by Mattie Stepanek, and newspaper article written by Courtland Milloy.
3. Conceptual: between Jairus as desperate parent and parents listening to sermon; between dying daughter of Jairus and Mattie Stepanek; between government health care debate and Christians caring about matters of death and life.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, Desmond Tutu's book, Courtland Milloy's article, Mattie's web page and poem.

**Sermon 7: The Reverend Shauna Hannan, Written for ELCA Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly (no title); John 13: 31-35; Acts 11: 1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21: 1-6. May 2, 2010**

I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings.

1. Place names with biblical connotations: Caesarea.
2. Common nouns naming objects or concepts from the Bible: profane; unclean; synod; betrayal; Holy Gospel; foot washing; wash their feet; virgin; Last Supper; inner circle; denying me; bread; crucified; risen one; denial;

commandment; Gospel; devout; Agapate allelous; Hallelujah; cross; Lutheran; Christians; commandment.

3. Time: Passover; kitchen table moments; before and after Jesus gives new commandment to love one another; new church trying to get started a generation after Jesus' death and resurrection.
4. People: God the alpha and the omega; God the father of Jesus; disciples; Jesus; Cornelius; Judas; Peter; children; gentiles, Judean believers; brothers and sisters; students in preaching class; Pastor Bouman; Floridians; men from Caesarea; naysayers.
5. Secular terms: Haiti; snow globe; "Together in Mission."

#### B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: Revelation; Psalm 148; St. John 13:31-35; Acts 11: 1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21: 1-6.
2. Goal of synod: "Together in Mission."
3. Words of Pastor Bouman.
4. Voice in Peter's vision.
5. Greek phrase: "Agapate allelous."

#### C. Discourse models

1. Bible scripture.
2. Gospel story of Peter's denial of Jesus.
3. Jesus washing feet of disciples at Last Supper.
4. Christian belief that we should love one another.
5. Snow globe.

6. Inner circle.
7. Jewish custom of eating kosher food.
8. Earthquake's effects on Haiti.

## II. Building task #2-building activities

### A. Activity.

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon. Secondary: preacher utilizing  
Texts listed above in section I.B.

### B. Action

1. Preaching; preacher asking audience to participate by saying phrase out loud.
  - a. Actions described within sermon: Jesus washing feet of disciples; Jesus giving Judas a piece of bread to indicate that Judas would betray him; Jesus giving new commandment that we must love one another as Jesus loved us; preacher asking students in preaching class about what makes Christian faith distinctive; hypothetical placing of church in snow globe; Peter having vision and being directed to travel to Caesarea to preach about Jesus.

## III. Building task #3-building identities

### A. Identity

1. Hannan as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Hannan as teacher of preaching class; Hannan as teacher of Greek phrase to congregation; Hannan as social being with knowledge of snow globe and events in Haiti.
2. Peter as person who denies Jesus three times.

3. Judas as person who betrays Jesus.
4. Peter as person who has vision and then travels to Caesarea and preaches to Cornelius-a gentile.
5. Jesus as teacher.
6. Congregation as participants in sermon.
7. Inner circle as disciples and family and friends.
8. Pastor Bouman as someone worth quoting.

#### IV. Building task #4-buildig relationships

##### A. Relationship

1. Primary: Shauna Hannan, as preacher, with listeners and readers of her words.  
Preacher uses personal pronouns to include listeners and readers.
2. Secondary (described within sermon): Hannan teaching students in preaching class; Hannan preaching at Florida-Bahamas Synod, beginning of capital campaign; Jesus and his inner circle; Peter and Gentiles; Gentiles and Jews; Peter and Cornelius; Peter and the naysayers; this congregation to other congregations in the synod; the preacher and the synod; Peter turns from friend of Jesus to denier of Jesus; Judas turns from loyal disciple to betrayer of Jesus.

#### V. Building task #5-buildig politics

##### A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of the preacher.
2. Power: status of preacher as professor of homiletics; preacher as teacher of Greek phrase; disciples as part of inner circle; Jesus as rabbi; listeners as they



define their own inner circle; Judas to betray Jesus; Peter to deny Jesus; Jesus in control at Last Supper (washes feet, gives bread to Judas); congregations in synod reaching out to other congregations.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Hannan connects past (question she asked in preaching class) to present (sermon she is preaching); Hannan connects the crucifixion of Jesus to the concept of Christians loving each other; Hannan connects comment Pastor Bouman made earlier in the synod to her sermon.
2. Textual: between biblical scripture and sermon; between Greek phrase and sermon; between phrase used by Pastor Bouman and sermon.
3. Conceptual: Hannan makes a connection between God's view of inner circle and the gathering of the synod.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon; the Bible

**Sermon 8: The Reverend Shauna Hannan, Written for Holy Cross Day (no title) John 3:13-17; September 18, 2008**

I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings

1. Place names with biblical connotations: Jerusalem.
2. Common names naming objects or concepts from the Bible: crucified and risen one; this table; pilgrims; Christians; Lutheran Church; incarnate divinity;

gifts of grace and mercy; tree, Paul's letter to the Corinthians; unbounded praise; endless mercy; cross; paradise; arm-stretching embrace.

3. Time: season of Lent; pilgrim's journey; year 400; preacher at age nine.
4. People: crucified Lord; seminary professor of preacher; pilgrims; God; children of God; Paul.
5. Secular terms: seminary.

#### B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: John 3: 13-17.
2. Story from preacher's seminary professor about original cross on which Jesus was crucified.
3. Quote from preacher's seminary professor.
4. Personal story by preacher.
5. Quote from Sally Brown.
6. Paul's words in letter to the Corinthians.

#### C. Discourse models

1. Reverence attached to cross in Christian faith.

### II. Building task #2-building activities

#### A. Activity.

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon. Secondary: preacher utilizing texts listed above in section I.B.

#### B. Action

1. Preaching.

- a. Actions described within the sermon: discovery by Emperor Constantine's mother of actual cross on which Jesus was crucified; story told by seminary professor in which deacons guarded original cross so pilgrims could not take a bite out of it when they kissed it; preacher's personal story about trying to be a miserable Christian; people misinterpreting the cross (justifying violent abuse); power of saving cross as it invigorates, heals and liberates.

### III. Building task #3-building identities

#### A. Identity

1. Hannan as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Hannan as nine-year-old child trying to follow what she thought church was teaching; Hannan as student in seminary; Hannan as teacher.
2. Emperor Constantine's mother as discoverer of original cross.
3. Seminary professor as teacher of story about pilgrims and original cross.
4. Church deacons as protectors of original cross.
5. Apostle Paul as interpreter of cross.

### IV. Building task #4-building relationships

#### A. Relationship

1. Primary: Shauna Hannan, as preacher, with listeners and readers of her words; use of personal pronouns to include listeners and readers of sermon.
2. Secondary (described within the sermon): preacher as student in seminary; listeners and readers as students learning from the preacher; church to pilgrims as it controls access to original cross; preacher as nine-year-old and

church teachings; cross and Christians; professor in seminary to preacher;  
cross to church and to scripture.

V. Building task #5-building politics

A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of preacher; of seminary professor; of Paul.
2. Power: of saving cross; of people who misinterpret cross; of deacons guarding original cross; of Lutheran Church over Hannan at age 9.

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Hannan connects past (origins of Holy Cross Day first celebrated in seventh and eighth centuries) and present (sermon of preacher); Hannan connects personal story of herself at age 9 to her herself today.
2. Textual: between Paul's words in letter to the Corinthians to preacher's sermon; between sermon and seminary professor's story; between Bible scripture and sermon.
3. Conceptual: cross represents power that will save the world.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, the Bible, the story about original cross, Paul's letter

**Sermon 9: The Reverend Wanda Neely, "When Christmas Comes for Everyone", Micah 5:2-5a; Philippians 2:5-11; December 20, 2009**

I. Building task #1-building significance

### A. Situated meanings

1. Common nouns naming objects or concepts from the Bible: Advent, hymn; Son of God; baptized; New Testament; stable; angels; shepherds.
2. Time: season of Advent.
3. Places: Chapel; Pitt County Memorial Hospital; fictional Presbyterian Church.
4. Secular terms; code red; fire; birth announcement; elders; questions of commitment; stand with the child; candles.
5. People: chaplain at hospital; patients at hospital; congregation at fictional church; Pastor David at fictional Presbyterian Church; Angus; elders; two babies; Minnie; Tina; Mildred Cory.

### B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: Micah 5: 2-5a; Philippians 2:5-11.
2. Book: *The Good News from North Haven* by Michael Lindvall; chapter title: "Christmas Baptism."
3. Quote from Pastor David.
4. Quote from Mildred Cory.

### C. Discourse models

1. Advent-season in church.
2. Hymns sung at Christmas.
3. Christian story of birth of Christ.
4. Shame of a pregnant, unmarried teenager.

## II. Building task #2-building activities

### A. Activity

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon. Secondary: preacher utilizing texts listed above in section I.B.
  - a. Actions described within the sermon: Preacher placed herself on sabbatical leave from being co-pastor at Presbyterian Church; preacher takes temporary position in chaplaincy at Pitt County Memorial Hospital; preacher put electric candles in front of chapel at hospital; Son of God born in a stable; Son of God giving up divine privileges; elder Angus McDowell asking Pastor David if his grandson can be baptized; Pastor asking questions about parent's church affiliation; Angus called elders to session to request permission for grandson to be baptized; baptism of baby Angus Larry scheduled for Thanksgiving weekend; Pastor David asking who stands with the child; Angus, Minnie, daughter-in-law's parents and cousins stood up for baby; Angus Larry baptized; Pastor David talking with Mildred Cory in church about unmarried, pregnant, teenaged daughter's child being baptized; pastor took request to elders for approval; baptism scheduled for Sunday before Christmas; baby James presented for baptism by mother Tina; Pastor asked who would stand with the child; Mildred stood up; Angus McDowell stood up; Minnie stood up; other elders stood up; middle school Sunday school teacher stood up; new young couple stood up; whole church stood up with baby Jimmy; Tina crying; two babies entered church during Advent.

### III. Building task #3-building identities

#### A. Identity

1. Neely as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Neely as story teller; Neely as hospital chaplain; Neely as educated person, utilizing story by Michael Lindvall; Neely as church-oriented person naming hymns.
2. Angus as church elder and grandfather.
3. Minnie as Angus' wife.
4. Pastor David as someone who tried to uphold traditions in his church and later does what is necessary.
5. Mildred Cory as mother of unmarried, pregnant teenager.
6. Tina as unmarried pregnant teenager transformed into a person embraced by entire congregation.

#### IV. Building task #4-building relationships

##### A. Relationship

1. Primary: Wanda Neely, as preacher, with listeners and readers of her words; personal pronouns used to include listeners and readers.
2. Secondary (described within sermon): Advent as season of church; story in The Good News from North Haven to sermon; Pastor David to elders at church; Pastor David to Angus; Pastor David to Mildred Cory; Angus to elders; Mildred Cory to Tina and baby James; baby James to entire congregation.

#### V. Building task #5-building politics

##### A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of the preacher with regard to Bible scripture, hospital culture, church tradition; of book by Michael Lindvall.

2. Gender: of pastor of fictional church; of both babies (male); of Angus the elder (male).
3. Power: of Angus the elder; of board of elders; of Pastor David; of congregation that stood up for baby James.

## VI. Building task #6-building connections

### A. Connections

1. Temporal: Neely connects past (event that happened at hospital two Sundays before) to present (sermon by preacher); song that began long ago to song continuing after we are gone; birth of Jesus in Bethlehem to present Christmas; year in life of fictional church in story; moving from Advent to Christmas; service on Sunday after Thanksgiving to service on Sunday before Christmas.
2. Textual: between story about fictitious church and church where preacher is preaching.
3. Conceptual: between the way the babies are baptized into the church (not the way it is supposed to be) and the way Christmas comes for everyone (not usually the way we expect it to come).

## VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

### A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, the Bible; the book, the hymn.

**Sermon 10: The Reverend Wanda Neely, “Fleeing From the Presence of the Lord”, Psalm 139:7-10; Jonah 1: 7-10, February 28, 2010**



I. Building task #1-building significance

A. Situated meanings.

1. Common nouns naming objects or concepts from the Bible: Old Testament; Easter; slingshot.
2. Place names and geographical terms with Biblical connotations: Egypt.
3. Time: Easter; Lent; Ash Wednesday; World War II;
4. People: Jonah; Ninevites; Abraham; Sarah; David; Moses; Goliath; Elijah; Will Rogers; William Carl; Paul; Francis Thompson, EMS crew; volunteers; pilot; hospital chaplain.
5. Secular terms: missionary; slingshot; Interstate 95; Holocaust; Dachau; Auschwitz; med-o-vac helicopter; ship.

B. Intertextuality

1. The Bible: Jonah 1: 7-10; Psalm 139: 7-10 Acts 14:15; Acts 17:24.
2. A quote from William Carl, president of Presbyterian seminary in Pittsburgh.
3. Poem by Francis Thompson.
4. Quote from hospital chaplain.

C. Discourse models

1. Christian understanding of Lent.
2. Duties of missionary.
3. Christian belief in one God.
4. Emergency medicine/advanced medicine.

II. Building task #2-building activities

A. Activity

1. Primary: the preacher preaching a sermon; Secondary; preacher utilizing texts listed above in section I.B.

## B. Action

### 1. Preaching.

- a. Actions described within the sermon: God calls Jonah to go to Ninevah and preach repentance; Jonah runs away from God's call; Jonah boards a ship heading in opposite direction; God sends a great wind upon the seas to sink the ship in which Jonah is traveling; captain of ship tells Jonah to call on God to see if he will save them; Ninevites who committed Holocaust of the Old Testament; crew on sinking ship throwing cargo overboard and praying to multiple Gods; Jonah allowing himself to be thrown overboard; Thompson living life as a derelict on streets of London; Thompson writing his column; helicopter landing on concrete pad behind preacher's home in Charlotte; emergency vehicles and volunteers surrounding landing pad with vehicles and shining light on landing pad so pilot could see to make landing; hospital chaplain making discovery about finding God.

## III. Building task #3-building identities

### A. Identity

1. Neely as preacher understanding and utilizing biblical scripture; Neely as educated person with knowledge about Holocaust and emergency landing pad near Charlotte; Neely as teacher; Neely as hospital chaplain.
2. William Carl as president of Presbyterian seminary in Pittsburgh.

3. Jonah as reluctant missionary.
4. Ninevites as violent people.
5. Crew of ship as worshippers of multiple Gods.
6. Thompson as derelict until rescued by friends.
7. EMS workers as life savers.
8. Volunteers as life savers.
9. Hospital chaplain as someone who found God.
10. Congregation as people who stop running from God and come to know God.

IV. Building task #4-building relationships

A. Relationship

1. Primary: Neely as preacher with listeners and readers of her words; use of personal pronouns to include listeners and readers.
2. Secondary (described within sermon): God more powerful than Jonah; God has control of wind; Ninevites have power to destroy Jonah's family; sailors think Jonah has power to save them; Francis Thompson failed at two professions and runs from God; pilot of helicopter as life saver; emergency workers and police officers and volunteers have power to help save the lives of injured persons; hospital chaplain discovers God in patient's room.

V. Building task #5-building politics

A. Social goods

1. Knowledge: of preacher; of hospital chaplain.
2. Status of William Carl as president of seminary; of people in Bible who follow God's commands; of Francis Thompson as writer of poem.

3. Power: of Ninevites to destroy; of Jonah who can stop the storm at sea by obeying God; of God who is all-knowing; volunteers, emergency workers, police officers who have power to help guide helicopter to landing pad

VI. Building task #6-building connections

A. Connections

1. Temporal: Neely makes a connection between Ash Wednesday to day sermon is preached; Neely reminds congregation of what they know about story of Jonah so far, and then continues story; connection between Old Testament and New Testament.
2. Textual: between biblical scripture, William Carl's quote, quote from hospital chaplain.
3. Historical: Nelly makes a connection between the Holocaust and the Ninevites.
4. People: Neely connects Francis Thompson's life: career as priest, then medicine, then becoming homeless and addicted to drugs, then present life as convert and believer; between helicopter landing and taking seriously sick and injured to hospital in Charlotte; between hospital chaplain's former prayer that she could help patients find God to preset day prayer that God will find her.

VII. Building task #7-building significance for sign systems and knowledge

A. Sign system

1. Writing: the sermon, the Bible.

## APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



### EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office  
1L-09 Brody Medical Sciences Building • 600 Moye Boulevard • Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 • Fax 252-744-2284 • [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

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**Date:** April 29, 2010

**Principal Investigator:** Pamela Hopkins  
**Dept./Ctr./Institute:** Dept of English  
**Mailstop or Address:** 106 A Joyner East, ECU

**RF:** Exempt Certification *LCR*  
**UMCIRB#** 10-0223  
**Funding Source:** Unfunded

**Title:** A Discourse Analysis of the Sermons of Female Preachers

Dear Pamela Hopkins:

On 4.26.10, the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) determined that your research meets ECU requirements and federal exemption criterion #2 which includes research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your Internal Processing Form and Protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

The UMCIRB Office will hold your exemption application for a period of five years from the date of this letter. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit an Exemption Certification Request at least 30 days before the end of the five year period.

Sincerely,

Chairperson, University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

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ii <http://www.antiochan.or/1440>

This argument is ironic given that Saint Thekla-a woman- was a disciple and companion of the Apostle Paul in the first century. As a young adult, Thekla listened to Paul preach. When he was imprisoned, she visited him against her parents' wishes. Her parents requested severe punishment for Thekla, and the Governor commanded that she be burned at the stake. A thunderstorm extinguished the flames before they reached Thekla. She later re-joined Paul in his journeys. When a young noble attempted to seduce Thekla, she resisted him and disgraced him in front of his peers. The Governor sentenced her to death, but again her life was spared. She rejoined Paul and asked to live a life of asceticism. Thekla died at the age of 90.