African American Lectionary Project
Hosted by:
Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Church of Memphis, TN

Homiletics and Hermeneutics for Church Renewal
Preaching Institute
Tuesday, October 16, 2012
11:00 am to 3:00 pm

American Baptist College is the institutional host for the African American Lectionary Project supported by the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment, Inc. Through this project, American Baptist College works with churches and seminaries to enhance prophetic and pastoral preaching for effective congregational ministry.

The purpose of the Preaching Institute is to bring together church leaders, homiletic professors and students to think theologically about matters of social crisis that impact preaching, worship and ministry in African America churches. The Preaching Institute is designed to aid pastors in the development of homiletics skills and assist them in developing their congregations into communities of theological reflection for ministry action.

We are pleased to partner with the Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Church as host for the Preaching Institute in the Memphis area. Local pastors and clergy of all denominations are cordially invited to participate in reflective and inspiring dialogue about Homiletics and Hermeneutics for Church Renewal. Participants will engage biblical and theological resources for social crisis preaching and congregational worship that inspires ministry action. Pastors, associate ministers, worship leaders and clergy in training will greatly benefit from the Preaching Institute. This event is free. RSVP your participation in the Preaching Institute by October 12, 2012. Lunch is provided.
Text to praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in dialogue by Abraham Kuruvilla

A fundamental issue for preachers of the Bible has always been achieving an approach that is both faithful to the textual intention as well as fitting for the listening audience. What is historical and distant (the text) is, in preaching, made contemporary and near (praxis). Particularly pertinent is how this transaction may be conducted with respect to the self-contained and well-defined quantum of the scriptural text that is regularly employed in liturgical contexts the pericope. This book answers the question: In a sermon intending to proclaim application from a pericope, what is the hermeneutical basis for moving validly from text to praxis, i.e., with authority and relevance?

The concept of theology as a bridge between text and praxis has not been specifically researched or rigorously substantiated. Kuruvilla seeks to do both, utilizing as entrees language philosophy, literary criticism, and a thorough understanding of "ordinary" language. Drawing from a variety of hermeneutical resources, he establishes "pericopal theology" as the intermediary between text and praxis. How this theology is discerned from the text and how application may be determined therefrom form the crux of this book. This novel approach lends validity to the movement from text to praxis and promises to be useful for any approach to the biblical text intended to culminate in application. Kuruvilla’s approach provides a substantial technical basis for such an operation.

Thus the preacher must be a "theologian-homiletician." It is the working out of this nomenclature, especially the "theologian" half of the appellation, that is the essence of this work, uniting as it does in one portfolio the responsibility of negotiating the demands of both hermeneutics and homiletics.

Lischer reviews the traditional understanding of King’s background being firmly influenced by his liberal education at Boston University. “The figures and ideas he engaged in his graduate study gave him a vocabulary with which he rationalized a more original black response to the events of his day” (p. 170). The word does not function as a theoretical base for action. Rather, the word is a kind of action that cannot legitimately be separated from the struggles, temptations, sufferings, and hopes of the people who live by the word. Therefore, Lischer concludes that it is from the black church pulpit that King found his authority.

Lischer states that King’s voice is lost in the published materials which are decontextualized because of the editorial process. The published sermons of King lack the themes that struck the chords in the black church. For example, the fatigue in his voice that was overwhelmed by his awakened urgency in his own message. King often found his voice in the pulpit. Published sermons lose the sense of style (“the how of the what”). The distinctions between what is said and how it is said is lost. Lischer states, “the style is the message” (p. 173). Under the heading of style, Lischer also notes King’s fascination with words and phrases, his force of repetition, and set-pieces.

Lischer compares King’s style with the medieval function of the Bible as a mirror that contains all life. King reads the pain of the black experience into the text and interprets that experience by means of the text.

King had a communal hermeneutic. The congregational dialogue that occurred every Sunday was an establishment of a connection between the text and the audience. Many internal meanings shared by the preacher and the congregation are signaled by certain passages, phrases, or set-pieces. The text is then experienced presently. Some of the same sermons are preached in white congregations. Lischer notes how the same messages and words are used but without the fire. The audience allowed him to “cook.”

Lischer documents how King’s own self-understanding changed. Primarily, these changes are seen as one looks at the hope expressed by King. He became a suffering
servant. Success would come by his own redemptive suffering. King began to rule out success for the movement but never faithfulness. He believed in the power of the word either to redeem the soul of America or to consign it to judgment.


Massey roots the African-American model in Robert Funk’s definition: “the hermeneut¾the one who practices hermeneutics¾is he who, having been addressed by the Word of God and having heard, is enabled to speak, interpret, or translate what he has heard into human vernacular so that its power is transmitted through speech. If the minister is not a hermeneutist, he has missed his vocation.” (In Language, Hermeneutics, and the Word of God (1966): 13-14.

- Focus on the life meaning—how life is experienced.
  - The text points to experience.
  - Fully engage the Word; enter its world.
  - Use imagination.
  - The controlling theology God reaches for people he loves, seen primarily through Jesus on Calvary.
  - Deliverance theme is paramount. (Emphasis on liberation and community).
  - Other themes and frameworks: covenant; promise/fulfillment; revelation as history; sacrifice.

- Know the hearer’s situation relevance.
  - Need to communicate what necessitates story.
  - Story has the power to engage the listener.
  - Story opens doors for new possibilities.

- Preaching mediates faith/meaning/presence
  - Preacher is the Agent of the Bible; identifies with the divine Word.
  - As hearer of the Word first, then speaker.
  - Therefore, there is a high view of the preacher’s role, perceived as needed for the future of the community.
Each sermon needs a goal (what the sermon plans to achieve). Sermon design is matched to that goal so that the goal is accomplished. Massey believes sermon design should meet the following concerns: increasing the understanding of listeners; increasing the connection between the sermon and the worship context; transforming the community of faith through preaching; meet the increasing need to pay attention to both the story of the text and the story “quality of human life;” and the arrangement of the sermon centered around a theme that meets these concerns.

Massey concisely describes several organizational methods for structuring the sermon. He discusses narrative, textual/expository, and doctrinal/topical methods pointing out both the strengths and weaknesses. A methodology for special occasion sermons using the funeral sermon as a paradigm is offered. Massey suggests a method to explore the design of sermons by the “masters.” If one can uncover jewels in the “masters” methods, then this becomes an effective resource for improving sermons. Finally, he offers three of his own sermons as models.