

**Walter Brueggemann: *Finally comes the poet - daring speech for proclamation* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1989)**

We preach mostly to believers. Yet the gospel is too readily heard and taken for granted, as though it contained no unsettling news and no unwelcome threat. What began as news in the gospel is easily assumed, slotted, and conveniently dismissed. We depart having heard, but without noticing the urge to transformation that is not readily compatible with our comfortable believing that asks little and receives less. The gospel is thus a truth widely held, but a truth greatly reduced. It is a truth that has been flattened, trivialized, and rendered inane. Partly, the gospel is simply an old habit among us, neither valued nor questioned. But more than that, our technical way of thinking reduces mystery to problem, transforms assurance into certitude, revises quality into quantity, and so takes the categories of biblical faith and represents them in manageable shapes. (pages 1-2).

In this book, then, I want to consider preaching as a poetic construal of an alternative world. The purpose of such preaching is to cherish the truth, to open the truth from its pervasive reductionism in our society, to break the fearful rationality that keeps the news from being new... After the engineers, inventors, and scientists, after all such control through knowledge, 'finally comes the poet'. The poet does not come to have a say until the human community has engaged in its best management. **Then perchance comes the power of poetry - shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities.** (6)

Preaching the text: it is not time for cleverness or novelty. It is not time for advice or scolding or urging, because the text is not any problem-solving answer or a flat, ideological agent that can bring resolve. This moment of speech is a poetic rendering in a community that has come all too often to expect nothing but prose. It is a prose world for all those who must meet payrolls and grade papers and pump gas and fly planes. When the text, too, has been reduced to prose, life becomes so prosaic that there is a dread dullness that besets the human spirit. We become mindless conformists or angry protesters, and there is no health in us. We become so beaten by prose that only poetic articulation has a chance to let us live... (9)

The preacher is called to weave an artistic connection between the text in its elusive, liberated truth, and the congregation in its propensity to hear the text in forms of reductionism. That task requires articulation of a great truth in the text that may be unnoticed reality in the congregation - unnoticed, or noticed and rejected, or routinised. Preaching makes it possible for something that has been closed to be powerfully disclosed... In addressing the theme of guilt and healing, the preacher has a threefold task of articulation. First, the preacher is to explicate the reality, power, destructiveness, and hurt that comes with sin and its accompanying guilt. That reality is more powerful and more destructive than we are wont to imagine. Second, the preacher is to construe an alternative. The biblical text trusts and asserts that reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration are indeed possible.... The third task of articulation for the preacher is to trace and voice the delicate, tortured, dramatic way in which God moves for and with us from one world to the other, a move wrought in love and faithfulness, but also wrought in grief and humiliation... this threefold task of articulation is so difficult precisely because these claims are already known in the church. They are, however, frequently known in such reductionist ways. The whole drama of guilt and forgiveness... is present and discerned in two terribly destructive forms [guilt and punishment, or cheap grace]. (13-15)