

Book review

Jane Miller Leatherman

Not as the Scribes: Jesus as a Model for Prophetic Preaching, by Ryan Ahlgrim. Scottsdale, PA; and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2002.

Ryan Ahlgrim has served as pastor to several congregations and has earned a D.Min. in preaching. He writes engagingly, espousing his understanding of Jesus' model of preaching while demonstrating that model both biblically and practically. The book moves through Ahlgrim's personal journey with preaching, to an examination of the different ways the scribes and Jesus preached, to a closer analysis of how Jesus preached, to some suggestions for

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creating new parables (as Jesus did). The book ends with five of Ahlgrim's prophetic sermons and some concluding statements.

Ahlgrim contends that there is the tendency in the church today to substitute the map (scripture), and learning about the map, for the real journey with the transforming Jesus. Prophetic preaching, Ahlgrim asserts, is the tool Jesus used and that today's Mennonite preachers can use to facilitate and

encourage transformation. He defines *scribal preaching* as speaking "about a subject, seeking to explain it and apply it," and *prophetic preaching* as embodying "the subject so that it is experienced by the listener" (15). He lists three primary components of prophetic preaching: speaking for God, being an embodiment of God's Word in the present, and facilitating transforming encounter with God. According to Ahlgrim, Jesus preached prophetically rather than interpreting the tradition, but today's preaching for the most part attempts to interpret the Jesus tradition rather than encouraging an encounter with the living Christ.

In confronting the question of whether we ought to preach as Jesus did—with authority (an important Mennonite issue!)—Ahlgrim observes that Jesus passed on his authority to others (see Luke 9–10). Second, he notes that preaching is an authoritative act, and that Jesus encouraged mutuality by engaging his hearers in conversation and interpretation. Third, he notes that the character of the preacher is important in prophetic preaching.

Ahlgrim uses story after story in this book, and he effectively demonstrates the process of weaving story, metaphor, and images, a method he highlights in Jesus' ministry of preaching and enacting transformation. I wanted more explanation for Ahlgrim's inclusion of some of the stories. In the absence of clear connections in the text, several stories left me unsure about why they were there. Perhaps I think too concretely! Or perhaps some preachers—and congregations—need just a little more explanation.

A strength of this book is its challenge to the church and to preachers to embrace the eschatological and practical transformation of Jesus' message and ministry in proclaiming the reign of God in the world. As I read these pages, I found myself asking again and again: How is my church experiencing the reality of God today? What is God doing in my life that is transformative right now? Where do I need transformation and healing?

Don Wardlaw, who writes the foreword, suggests that the reader experience Ahlgrim's five sermons before reading the rest of the book. The last sermon in particular touched me deeply, reminding me that good preaching is a great gift to the church and inspiring me to do the work necessary to preach as Jesus did, in order to facilitate encounter with the God of steadfast love and kindness, who transforms and redeems us and the world.

About the reviewer

Jane Miller Leatherman works for hospice and does spiritual direction and pastoral counseling from her office in Goshen, Indiana. She has five adult children and eight grandchildren.