
DISCERNMENT AND PREACHING

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Course HM30/PC30
Term II: Winter 2003-4, Thursday, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

Drs. Martha Robbins and Teresa Lockhart Stricklen

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:

In this course students will learn aspects of the theory and practice of Christian discernment as related to preaching. We will learn how to discern Word for the purpose of fostering the spiritual growth of our parishioners, our congregations, and the world. Specifically, participants will engage in the practice of discernment through lectio divina and examen, biblical exegesis, and congregational/contextual analysis for the sake of preaching a transformative Word of God.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- * To increase our capacity to recognize and listen to Word as it addresses us in various ways and contexts
- * To grow in personal discernment of Word through the practice of *lectio divina*, *examen*, and through the doing of biblical exegesis
- * To grow in corporate discernment of Word through congregational and social analyses
- * To learn to speak a prophetic or transformative Word
- * To improve preaching through engagement in intentional discernment processes

REQUIREMENTS:

Required texts:

Holland & Henriot. *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*. Orbis
Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Scripture & Discernment*. Abingdon Press.
Linn, Dennis, Sheila & Matt. *Sleeping with Bread*. Paulist Press.
Marshall, Molly. *Joining the Dance: A Theology of Spirit*. Judson Press.
Smith, Gordon. *Listening to God in Times of Choice*. InterVarsity Press.

Bring Audio cassette tape if you want sermon taped.

Recommended Text:

Marjorie Suchocki. *The Whispered Word*. Chalice Press.

ASSIGNMENTS:

- * Reading assignments & weekly exercises (see weekly schedule)
- * Regular personal engagement in *lectio divina* & *examen*
- * Regular journaling in which you note “God sightings” (What’s going on with you spiritually, with members of your congregation, in your region & world, things you come across “that will preach.”) These journals will be looked at Jan. 8 & Feb 12.

- * The manuscript for a 10-minute sermon on one (or a combination of) text(s) for Advent 4: Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:47-55 or Ps. 80:1-7; Heb. 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45
- * Preaching of one sermon due at end of course on texts for Transfiguration Sunday: Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36; Ps. 99
Text of sermon typed 12 point – double spaced, one inch margins with the following supporting documents attached:
 - (a) Exegesis of text(s) (Due Feb. 5)
 - (b) Congregational Analysis: incorporating insights from Group Lectio Divina with members from congregation on selected Scripture passages for Transfiguration Sunday AND your observations during pastoral care visits, informal interactions listening to and for God’s Word (presence and activity) in their lives, and in the life of the congregation; identifying roadblocks to Word/Spirit; places/ issues which need a transformative Word to be spoken etc.. (Due Jan. 22)
 - (c) An analysis of the larger culture in which your particular preaching situation occurs by completing the questions found in the Afterword of *Social Analysis*. (Due Jan. 29)

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Dec. 4 **Listening to and for God:** *Lectio Divina* and *Examen*
Introductions and course overview.

Dec. 11 **The Spirit and the Word.**

Assignment: Have read *Joining the Dance: A Theology of Spirit*

As you read, reflect upon how theology that starts with the Holy Spirit differs from that which starts with Christ or God. Notice how your own awareness of Spirit grows or deepens in all aspects of Faith and life.

Dec. 18 **Preaching and the Spirit: The Hermeneutical Web**

Assignment: Working with lectionary passages for Advent 4 (listed in Requirements above), prepare a manuscript for a ten-minute sermon for your particular preaching situation and bring the manuscript and preparatory notes to class to turn in.

Jan. 8 **Process of Discernment: Individual**

Assignment: Read: *Listening to God in Times of Choice*
Turn in journals.

Jan. 15 **Process of Discernment: Corporate**

Assignment: Read Luke Timothy Johnson, Chaps. 1, 5, 6, 8

Jan. 22 **Discerning Word for Congregation**

Assignment: Meet with a group from your church around the lections for Transfiguration Sunday (listed in Requirements above). Write up your notes about what people hear in the scriptures and include this with your observations regarding where God is speaking, where there are roadblocks to Word/Spirit; and what voids there are in your preaching situation into which God longs to speak a transformative word and how and when that might best happen.

Jan. 29 **Discernment and Larger Socio-Cultural Concerns**

Assignment: Read *Social Analysis*, Intro., Chap. 1, 2, Conclusion, Afterword. Come with completed social analysis of your preaching situation's larger cultural setting using the methodology in the Afterword (pp. 95-109).

Feb. 5 **Scripture and Tradition: Discerning Word in Scripture and Worship.**

Assignment: Have exegesis done when come to class for texts on Transfiguration of the Lord.

Feb. 12 **Discerning Images and Language that Will Speak in Preaching**

Assignment: Turn in journals; Preaching: 3 sermons

Feb. 19 **Homiletic Discernments.** Preaching: 3 sermons

Final Exam Period (Feb. 26?) Preaching 5 sermons

EVALUATION

Your final grade will be figured as follows:

Journaling and Preparation	20%
Advent sermon manuscript	20%
Transfiguration sermon & supporting materials	60%

PROFESSORS' AVAILABILITY

Martha Robbins MRobbins@pts.edu (412) 362-5610 ext. 2125
Office: McNaugher 313 Hours: By Appointment.

Teresa Stricklen TStricklen@pts.edu (412) 362-5610 ext. 2156
Office: McNaugher 319
Hours: Wed. 3:00-4:00; Thurs. 10-11:30; 5:00-6:00
Other times by appointment.