

“Vocation”

Chapter three of Barbara Brown Taylor’s

The Preaching Life

1. The CRC regards clergy differently than the Episcopal Church does. We do not have priests, nor do our sanctuaries have altars, because we have one high priest, Jesus Christ, and have no further need for sacrifices. Episcopal churches have altars because we continually offer our bodies as living sacrifices, this being our “spiritual act of worship,” to allude to Romans 12:1.

The pastor of a CRC church is a member of the board of elders, and an employee of the church. In the Episcopal tradition more authority rests with the priest. Though, in practice, both are treated with the same high level of respect, and are given a large degree of authority.

Setting aside these differences, what is BBT’s view of the practice ordained clergy? What dangers result? (Cf. p. 27, end of par. 2.) Do you agree?

2. BBT quotes a parishioner, having heard her say that the laity are central to God’s plans, as saying, “I’m sorry, but I don’t want to be that important.” (28)

She proposes that a true vision of the priesthood of believers means

...priests are likely to wear a hundred hats—social worker, chauffeurs, cook, financial advisor, community organizer, babysitter, philanthropist, marriage counselor, cheerleader, friend—but whatever hat they happen to be wearing at the time, priests remember that they wear it as God’s person, for God’s sake, in God’s name. (31)

What would it mean to you to follow this vision, if you do not already? How does this translate into genuine ministry, and not, as she says, merely mean doing more things?

3. The tools of our jobs, and all elements of our lives, thus become *our* sacraments:

Such everyday sacraments maybe easier to discern in our personal lives—sacraments of friends, family, home, nature—but since we are called to be priests wherever we are, it is important that we learn to recognize them in our professional lives as well. (35)

She adds,

[These sacraments] may sometimes be difficult to recognize in the cares and occupations of our lives, and they may sometimes reveal truths we would rather not see, but to deny their existence—to declare any part of our lives devoid of sacraments—is to deny the sovereignty of God. (36)

- a. Last week we discussed the “sacramental” view. What *would* it mean to treat your desk, phone, computer, family, car, etc., sacramentally?
 - b. What do you think she means when she refers to “truths we would rather not see?”
4. BBT describes preaching as a communal exercise of exploration:

...preaching becomes something the whole community participates in, not only through their response to a particular sermon but also through identifying with the preacher. As they listen week after week, they are invited to see the world the way the preacher does—as the realm of God’s activity—and to make connections between their Christian faith and their lives the same way they hear them made from the pulpit. If the preaching they hear is effective, it will not hand them sacks of wisdom and advice to take home

and consume during the week, but invite them into the field to harvest those fruits for themselves, until they become preachers in their own right. (32)

- a. Do you know what she means? Have you ever heard a preacher who used this approach?
 - b. How does this compare to your experience listening to Chris Fluit's sermons? Or Jim Van Tholen's or Carl Tuyl's or Russ Palsrok's?
 - c. For BBT, this approach to preaching flows naturally from seeing the body of Christ as a priesthood of believers. *Why?*
5. If every part of our lives becomes part of our ministry and calling as baptized Christians, then all becomes not just an act of worship and celebration of the sacraments, but also a form of witness:

While a lay person's trips to the pulpit may be few, this good news cannot help but creep into everyday discourse, until conversations with colleagues, midnight talks with children, and telephone calls to ailing friends all resound with the faith, hope and love of someone engaged in the ministry of the word.

How do you share the gospel with others? What do you make of BBT's point of view?