

**THROUGH HER EYES:
THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN PREACHERS AND WHY THE
CHURCH DESPERATELY NEEDS THEM**

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ABSTRACT

Faithful exposition of Scripture and effective communication are vital commitments shared across the evangelical tradition. While these commitments are homogeneous, the preachers ought not to be. The best of today's biblical preaching comes through the mouths and bodies of a diverse multitude.

In this paper, I explore the unique contributions of women preachers and argue for their necessity in our pulpits. Through examining specific sermons by women preachers, I demonstrate the way female expositors offer often-overlooked hermeneutical insights. I argue that what follows from these insights are potent sermon illustrations and applications that speak to half the room. Lastly, I identify several distinct homiletical virtues that women preachers bring with them into the pulpit, including embodied presence, centering the margins, and empathetic sensitivity.

INTRODUCTION

Homileticians have long recognized that the act of preaching involves more than just the biblical text and the gathered congregation—it necessarily includes the preacher. As Haddon Robinson observed, “the audience does not simply hear a sermon; it hears a person.”¹ And this person—this preacher—rises carrying more than a Bible and a manuscript; they also bring their particularities including their body, voice, lived experience, and social location. Far from an abstract exercise, preaching is a full-bodied event, and central to that embodiment is gender.² On any given Sunday, the pulpit is occupied not by a generic, formless speaker, but by women and men whose gendered particularities inflect the proclamation of the Word.

This paper argues that women preachers offer distinct contributions through their pulpit ministry.³ While many cases can be made for the necessity of women preachers, such as the biblical witness, the mission of God, matters of equality, etc., this paper is primarily concerned with demonstrating the uniqueness of women preachers as a case for women preaching. In the still male-dominated sport that is preaching, this paper contends that women should be regarded

¹ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2024), 8.

² In addition to gender, biological sex is also an aspect of this conversation. Biological sex shapes elements such as vocal range and physical presence, while gender—socially constructed roles, expectations, and norms—frames how those physical traits and preaching styles are perceived.

³ I use the term “women preachers” throughout as opposed to “female preachers.” This is largely a stylistic choice, but one that emphasizes the person in the pulpit. “Women” is a noun referring to people, while “female” is an adjective describing biology. “Women preachers” speaks to the humanity of the preacher, rather than reducing her to a biological category.

not as an optional addition in the pulpit, but as an essential presence.⁴ The aim here is to persuade churches, pastors, boards, seminaries, professors, and academic societies such as the Evangelical Homiletics Society to recognize women's preaching not merely as optional but as necessary. The conclusion briefly offers suggestions for further steps toward that end.

WOMEN ARE NOT A MONOLITH

It is critical to state upfront: women are not a monolith. In many contexts, particularly within Evangelicalism, the presence of a man in the pulpit is seen as normative. His gender, being assumed, typically goes unnoticed; listeners rarely reduce him to "a male preacher." By contrast, women preachers—still a relatively rare sight in such settings—often find that their gender becomes the most salient identity marker. This heightened awareness can invite overemphasis and stereotyping. Carol Norén calls this "the representative function": the tendency for a woman in the pulpit to be perceived as representing all women, a perception intensified by the congregation's acute awareness of her gender.⁵

Alice Mathews cautions against stereotyping: "Women are never generic; they are individuals with gender in common but with enormous differences between them."⁶ While some stereotypes may find occasional confirming examples, the popular "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" framework often reinforces unhelpful essentialism, especially in the pulpit.⁷ The voices, personalities, bodies, hobbies, and cultural backgrounds vary widely among women and cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, women share common realities of what it feels like to be a woman in the world. They share a common experience of embodiment, shaped both by biological realities—such as fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and menopause—and by social conditions, including misogyny, sexism, exclusion, threats to safety, and objectification.

The observations that follow do not attempt to reduce women's preaching to a set of shared traits. Rather, the aim is to illuminate the ways in which women's embodiment and lived experience inform their preaching, contributing perspectives and gifts that are indispensable to the life of the church and edifying for congregations, both women and men alike.

A WORD ON THE SELECTION OF SERMONS

This study analyzes twenty sermons selected specifically in video format rather than print manuscript to allow for observations that account for embodiment.⁸ All are from within the past decade, reflecting the recent increased availability of women's sermons online. Additionally,

⁴ This paper is written from the presupposition that Scripture does not prohibit women from preaching. See John Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice: A Biblical Invitation for Women to Preach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) for a case that preaching by women is faithful to Scripture—a conclusion he defends independently of debates over women's ordination, which neither he nor I address.

⁵ Carol Norén, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 40.

⁶ Alice Mathews, *Preaching the Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 25.

⁷ See John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

⁸ One exception is the featured sermons by Christine Redwood which are only available in audio format.

most sermons are from seasoned preachers with larger platforms whose recordings are most accessible; many also hold seminary degrees and doctorates. All sermons are delivered in broadly evangelical, mixed-gender congregations. Contexts with exclusively female audiences were excluded, despite often being easier to find. Future research would benefit from engaging women preachers in the Global South, especially in light of the church's shifting center of gravity.

CONTRIBUTION #1) OFTEN-OVERLOOKED HERMENEUTICAL INSIGHTS

In a 2013 lecture at the University of Cambridge, Rowan Williams asserted that the task of the minister is “to stand there and tell us what you see.”⁹ The same could be said of the task of the preacher. Central to the preacher's assignment is to look deeply into the Scriptures in study, to look reverently into the face of God in prayer, to look attentively for the movement of the Spirit, and then to stand in the pulpit and tell the gathered community what she sees. When women preachers stand and tell us what they see from their vantage point, the listeners can gain fresh insights.

Because the normative image of a preacher and biblical interpreter has long been male, women can draw attention to elements of a biblical passage that might otherwise remain unnoticed, and then bring them to life in the sermon.¹⁰ As Liz Shercliff observes in *Preaching Women: Gender, Power and the Pulpit*, “women reading Scripture self-consciously as women should find much material there that is hidden from men readers.”¹¹

One example of often-overlooked insights is from a sermon entitled “Keep Pushing” by Sheleta E. Fomby on Exodus 1:1-20.¹² She observes that the Israelite men likely were not the only ones subject to slave labor in Egypt, but that the plural pronoun likely includes the Israelite women.

⁹ Rowan Williams, “The Nature of Ordained Ministry,” *Life and Service*, Westcott House, University of Cambridge, October 22, 2013, audio, https://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1582524/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that women interpreting and preaching a text does not automatically necessitate a feminist reading. While some may take a feminist reading (such as the latter example of Christine Redwood), this ought not to be assumed merely because a woman is drawing out an often-overlooked insight. A survey on evangelical women preachers conducted by EHS member Arica Heald Demme found that some evangelical women experienced assumptions from others who wrongly concluded they adhered to a liberal theology solely because they were female. (See Arica Heald Demme, “Lament and Hope of a Female Evangelical Preacher,” EHS Conference Paper, 2021.) Carol Norén offers a correction when she writes, “a woman does not have to regard the Bible and tradition as patriarchal articulation in order to bring a new perspective to the task of exegesis.” (See Norén, *The Woman in the Pulpit*, 102.) It is critical to resist generalities here, lest we assume a man's perspective to a text is standard, while a woman's perspective is feminist.

¹¹ Shercliff, 22.

¹² Sheleta Fomby, “Keep Pushing,” sermon at Ebenezer AME Church, Fort Washington, Maryland, September 30, 2024, YouTube video, https://youtu.be/PYB3JUByjZk?si=nQOP8UzBIT-BAU_5&t=982.

She calls this “the plurality of the brutality.”¹³ In a powerful preaching moment, Fomby lifts up the story within the story—the story of the women.

They face the dual demand, the double burden of both building and birthing all at the same time... They worked in the field by day and raised an entire generation by night... Pharaoh thought the forced labor would adversely affect their fertility, but look at the unrelenting resilience of the women... They experienced exponential growth under extraordinary circumstances.¹⁴

This easily-missed detail leads into a high point in Fomby’s sermon where she encourages those in the room who often feel overlooked (especially women and mothers), exhorting them to keep pushing, a reference she develops more later in light of the Hebrew women and midwives.

Another example is in the work of Christine Redwood in her sermon series on the book of Judges. In her recent book *Hear Her Voice: Preaching the Women of the Bible*, the Australian pastor demonstrates an attentiveness to easily-overlooked characters who get little air time in the text itself and subsequently in sermons.¹⁵ In a sermon on the tragic story of Jephthah’s daughter, Redwood confronts harmful interpretive approaches to the text; ones that have made the daughter a representation of faithfulness to the greater good of the nation of Israel.

God gave them this land... her family worked hard... This is her home, her people, her nation. What wouldn’t she do for her country?... Some say, ‘This story is horrible, but at least Jephthah was faithful to his vow, at least his daughter was faithful... Be like Jephthah’s daughter. Be a good girl.’ But I am not listening anymore... It’s not always a good thing to be the good girl.¹⁶

Redwood rejects a reading that would make Jephthah or his daughter a hero. She demonstrates a different way of reading this unsettling text, interpreting it instead as a cautionary tale. Redwood challenges her audience that there are times when faithfulness looks like shaking things up instead of going along with the status quo. She then points to the exemplar Jesus who was a holy troublemaker and whose death led to a disruptive resurrection.

In her 2024 sermon at the Evangelical Homiletics Society annual conference, Patricia Batten preached on the Syrophoenician woman from Matthew 15:21-28.¹⁷ Though many commentators have written on this text, Batten highlights the multiple layers of the woman’s identity, demonstrating the intersectionality at play. She carefully unpacks each aspect: the character is a first-century woman, a mother, an outsider, and an enemy.

¹³ Ibid., 16:22.

¹⁴ Ibid., 18:25.

¹⁵ Christine Redwood, *Hear Her Voice: Preaching the Women of the Bible* (Eugene: Cascade, 2024).

¹⁶ Ibid., 88-9.

¹⁷ Patricia Batten, “EHS Session 5,” Evangelical Homiletics Society Annual Meeting, Lancaster, PA, October 2024, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qz6HIteBx-A&list=PLcy4Jd_EAFqoPL0xbhpoN7jVf_sbxCt8B&index=6&t=2547s.

This groundwork sets up the difficult dialogue between the woman and Jesus in verses 24–28, where Jesus speaks harshly. Building upon Kenneth Bailey’s work, Batten suggests Jesus may have been reflecting the disciples’ prejudices back to them to provoke self-reflection: “Are you really comfortable with this? Are you really okay with this?”¹⁸ Batten is helping the listeners fill in the gaps of what may have been going on during the tense scene.

Batten further contrasts the woman, commended for her great faith, with Peter, previously labeled “ye of little faith,” making a necessary connection. By the sermon’s conclusion, Batten flips the script: the expansive mercy demonstrated is not only for the woman-mother-outsider-enemy but also for the disciples and, ultimately, for all of us. Through nuanced exposition, Batten brings the text’s emotional and hermeneutical details to life, producing a memorable sermon in the EHS archive.

Fomby, Redwood, and Batten offer examples of the ways women preachers, through close readings of Scripture, draw out insights from the biblical text that can go unnoticed and bring those to bear in the sermon. Grace Ji-Sun Kim calls this “reading against the grain,” a reading that is attentive to the details, characters, and unspoken nuances in the text.¹⁹ From their unique vantage point as women, women preachers stand before us and tell us what they see.

CONTRIBUTION #2) POTENT ILLUSTRATIONS & APPLICATIONS

Effective preachers address the diversity of their hearers, offering a variety of illustrations and applications to attempt to connect with different types of hearers. The arsenal of illustrations and applications are critical to the preacher’s ability to bridge biblical truth to relevant life decisions. Women preachers, speaking from their social location as women, are able to offer and embody illustrations and applications in ways that are different from their male counterparts. Thomas Troeger states that women preachers bring “experience, perspective, and witness [which] are essential to the church’s proclamation because they reveal how the Spirit is moving through women’s lives and thought.”²⁰

This is especially relevant in light of research that shows women’s church attendance has declined since the early 2000s.²¹ While causes vary—increased demands across work and home, disillusionment over church leadership scandals, lingering effects of COVID-19²²—research also reveals that only 24% of women (compared to 31% of men) feel they are using their unique gifts

¹⁸ Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 217-226 cited in Batten, “EHS Session 5,” 29:00.

¹⁹ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, “What does the Mustard Seed have to do with Faith?,” Gordon-Conwell, March 4, 2020, YouTube Video, 14:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHg0hGqxibg>.

²⁰ Thomas H. Troeger, foreword to *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), viii.

²¹ See Barna Group, “State of the Church 2025,” report, <https://barna.gloo.us/sotc>. See also Faith on View, “Men Now Outpace Women in Church Attendance: 2025 Barna Report,” April 3, 2025, www.faithonview.com/men-now-outpace-women-in-church-attendance-2025-barna-report/.

²² See also Diana Chandler, “Survey: More Men Attending Church Than Women, Volunteering Rebounds,” *The Roys Report*, March 31, 2025, <https://julieroys.com/survey-more-men-attending-church-women-volunteering-rebounds/>.

in service outside the workplace.²³ Barna urges churches to consider ways to affirm the value of women in their congregations, speaking to their calling across home, work, and church.²⁴ Women preachers are uniquely positioned to articulate insights arising from women's experiences in ways that male counterparts cannot, thereby enriching the theological imagination and spiritual formation of the entire congregation—men and women alike.

Women preachers offer potent illustrations in obvious and subtle ways. In her sermon “God Never Sleeps,” Cokiesha Bailey Robinson refers to herself as the auntie in the room on several occasions.²⁵ Naming this identity marker not only acknowledges a familial atmosphere, it also reminds the audience of her situatedness as a woman and the place from which she speaks. This seemingly small word choice is impactful, in that it inadvertently signals to the other aunties, mothers, grandmothers, women in the room that they have a place here, as if to say “I have a voice here, and so do you.”

In her sermon “Marked for Power,” Pastor Bianca Juarez preaches from Mark 1 calling the congregation to walk in the authority of Jesus over evil. She offers an illustration from her own life.

I get to church every Sunday morning at 6:30 with my heels and fake eyelashes, and I anoint every single chair and pray over it because I know there is power and authority in my words... I'm not weeping or wailing, I'm simply saying [to the enemy] with a smile on my face, like my Puerto Rican mama, “Get out.”²⁶

Juarez demonstrates that she is not walking in the authority of Christ *despite* being a woman; she is walking in the authority of Christ *as* a woman, which for her, means certain accessories, shoes, etc. As she exhorts the mixed audience to walk in authority, she does not have to explicitly state that this includes women, because she is illustrating this with her own embodiment and language.

The use of inclusive language is a feature of women preachers as a way of speaking to the whole room. Fleming Rutledge provides a subtle yet significant example in her sermon on Psalm 102 when she uses a feminine pronoun for the unknown psalmist, who we only know to be an afflicted person who has grown weak and pours out lament before the Lord, based on the editorial note. Rutledge declares: “The psalmist is in deep trouble, to the bottom of *her* soul... but *she* speaks passionately to God, not so much because *she* is needy... but because *she* knows

²³ Barna Group, “Christians at Work,” report, Fall 2018, https://shop.barna.com/products/christians-at-work?_pos=1&_sid=f5ddf0277&_ss=r&_gl=1*901zq1*_ga*MTMzNzgZODY1Ni4xNzU1MDE1NTgy*_ga_Y2DEHP04LQ*cze3NTUwMTU1ODlkBzEkZzEkdDE3NTUwMTYxNDgkajYwJGwwJGgw.

²⁴ Ryan Burge, “Behind the Steep Decline in Church Attendance Among Women,” Barna Group, March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/changes-behind-the-scenes/>.

²⁵ Cokiesha Bailey Robinson, “God Never Sleeps,” Antioch Fellowship Church, Dallas, TX, September 20, 2023, YouTube video, 9:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ4igVInl6w>.

²⁶ Bianca Juarez (formerly Olthoff), “Marked for Power,” Crossroads Church, October 3, 2022, YouTube TV, 28:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3ue8Y8OKT4>.

who God is.”²⁷ Liz Sheriff notes that women are typically the ones expected to “read themselves in” to certain texts or sermons when phrases appear like “dearly beloved brothers” or “sonship.”²⁸ While the Psalmist was unlikely to have been a woman in that historical context, imagining these words as spoken by a woman gives voice and presence to women in the congregation, freeing them from the burden of having to insert themselves into the text.

In each of these examples, even the basic reality of hearing a sermon in a woman’s voice can have a meaningful impact on the female listeners, communicating at a deeper level that if God can speak through a voice that sounds like theirs, he may just want to work in and through their life too. In a sermon given at Truett Seminary called “Preach Like John!,” Carolyn Ann Knight shares that she often wondered how she, as an African American woman, could “stand in John’s shoes” to preach.²⁹ She reminds us what she herself has come to believe, that God works on the margins and through unexpected persons and places today, much like he did in the past through the ministry of John the Baptist.³⁰

Lisa Harper, in her sermon “The Power of Dependency” at Elevation Church, shares about her journey into adoption and motherhood. She even shares a humorous story about her daughter growing up and becoming less reliant on her. She alludes to her daughter being on her period (“PMS gremlins”) and she herself going through menopause, something which all women experience in their lifetime.³¹ Her purpose with her illustration is to contrast how children typically grow less dependent on their parents over time with how, as children of God, we grow more aware of our dependence on Him. By addressing women’s lived realities in her illustration, Harper affirms and normalizes their embodied experiences, challenging what Nancy Gross identifies as the pervasive and troubling notion that “it is precisely women’s bodies that make women wrong.”³²

Nicole Massie Martin, in her sermon at the 2025 E.K. Bailey Preaching, tells a story about baking cookies with her daughter.³³ She humorously shares about how they were the worst cookie batch in history; the reason being she did not follow the directions. She connects this to the importance of following the directions God gives us in his word to get the desired result. The characters of her illustration (a mother and daughter) give acknowledgement to all the mothers

²⁷ Fleming Rutledge, Psalm 102, Wheaton College, April 5, 2019, YouTube video, 15:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaaxFf6mDyI&list=PLE6RpZ3bWz-9Ks59oO7lYvSDY3ZlIu0KL>, emphasis mine.

²⁸ Shercliff, 89.

²⁹ Carolyn Ann Knight, “Preach Like John!,” Truett Seminary, Waco, TX, January 29, 2024, YouTube video, 36:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPPMSkGD4Is&t=1303s>.

³⁰ Ibid., 44:00.

³¹ Lisa Harper, “The Power of Dependency,” Elevation Church, July 6, 2025, YouTube video, 6:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3uiblQ122c>.

³² Nancy Gross, *Women’s Voices and the Practice of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2017), 72.

³³ Nicole Massey Martin, “Close Encounters of the God Kind: Israel Crosses the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1-31),” EK Bailey Preaching Conference, July 8, 2025, video, 60:03, <https://www.ekbpc.com/hub/events/471e602b-bc51-455f-bcb6-9386a5371910/sessions/47c33108-1d65-4401-8448-a1f6696aedbc?autoplay=true>.

and daughters in the room who can perhaps envision this very scene in their own life, lending to an illustration and biblical principle that may stick with them in a personal way.

Pat Batten, in the aforementioned sermon, shares from her own experiences as a mother of young kids, including stories of giving birth to her daughter, the overwhelm of having a child with down syndrome, and difficult times in parenting. She reveals the many hats of being a mother, a professional, a ministry leader and more; a reality that many women (and men) can relate to. Batten's real-life stories give voice to women's concerns in a way that is authentic, helping connect the audience in real ways to the biblical character who is also a woman and mother.

At the Potter's House upon the event of T.D. Jakes' handing over of the ministry, Cindy Trimm preaches using birthing metaphors uniquely understood by many women. She describes the historical moment as "a moment when prayer becomes the midwife and causes the womb to contract," calling this "the womb of destiny, needing that final push [which] begins to birth out the next."³⁴ She links this to Romans 8, drawing from The Message translation which speaks of a pregnant creation, birth pangs, and being enlarged in waiting.³⁵ Retired homiletics professor Joan Delplane notes, "I don't know that many men would find in the preaching experience a birthing metaphor, and yet it is [there] for me and it fits."³⁶

Christine Caine preaches from the story of Joseph on the power of forgiveness in her sermon "Forgive Them Anyway."³⁷ She shares about abuse she experienced in her own life and her journey to forgiveness. She carefully and pastorally walks her listeners through how to and how not to apply this principle, particularly when it relates to abuse and danger.

Forgiveness does not mean you stay in an unsafe place... If you're in a dangerous situation, get out of it before you even start to go down the road that I'm talking about... Forgiveness does not mean you excuse or allow criminal or dangerous behavior... but what I am talking about is being set free, so they no longer have over me.³⁸

This application is particularly significant for women, over half of whom experience sexual violence involving physical contact at some point in their lives.³⁹ These realities make Caine's experience and application especially relevant for the women in the room, while also relevant for the many men who are victims of abuse.

³⁴ Cindy Trimm, "The Last Sermon: Leadership Redefined," The Potter's House, July 6, 2025, YouTube video, 8:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvSmLF32jfE>.

³⁵ Trimm, 9:09.

³⁶ See interview in Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *The Last Sermon: Leadership Redefined - Dr. Cindy Trimm* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2021), 59.

³⁷ Christine Caine, "Forgive them Anyway," Christ Fellowship Church, July 27, 2025, YouTube Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJmquwvoi7g>.

³⁸ Ibid., 34:30.

³⁹ Center for Disease Control, "About Sexual Violence," January 23, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/sexual-violence/about/index.html>.

Grace Ji-Sun Kim, in her sermon on the mustard seed, preaches on our tendency to overlook small things.⁴⁰ She addresses that women can often wonder if they themselves are too small to do something for God. She highlights the women around Jesus and their role in spreading the gospel, noting that many women's names and stories are lost to history. Speaking to the insecurity women can feel in the face of misogyny, Kim urges all—men and women—to remember their foremothers, acknowledging the women who first taught them the gospel.⁴¹

CONTRIBUTION #3) DISTINCT HOMILIETICAL VIRTUES

I frame this final section around what I term “homiletical virtues,” suggesting that women often bring certain distinctive virtues to the pulpit.

Embodied Presence: Active Invitation in Conclusions

Mary Hulst reminds us that our bodies are tools for our preaching.⁴² In multiple sermons I analyzed, women preachers concluded by embodying a posture or action—such as standing, kneeling, or inviting congregants into an exercise—thereby collapsing the speaker–listener divide and activating the congregation in a shared embodied practice. This invitational approach, particularly in the sermon's climactic moments, proved both affective and effective, eliciting emotional and physical engagement from the gathered community.

Danielle Brown preached on Exodus 33:12–23 at the 2025 E.K. Bailey Preaching Conference, encouraging leaders with the truth that God has a place for them by him (v. 21).⁴³ Near the conclusion, as Brown's volume rises, accompanied by organ and music, the congregation stands—an apex that could have been her final crescendo. Instead, with careful voice control, she quiets the room, addresses the weary leaders, and invites the congregation to pray for their neighbor, transforming the closing moments into a communal act of embodied care.⁴⁴ Frederick Haynes III later observed that both Brown and Nicole Massie Martin were boldly themselves, noting that “neither one of them tried to be men.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, “What does the Mustard Seed have to do with Faith?,” Gordon-Conwell, March 4, 2020, YouTube Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHg0hGqxiBg>.

⁴¹ Ibid., 29:40.

⁴² Mary Hulst, *A Little Handbook for Preachers: Ten Practical Ways to a Better Sermon by Sunday* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 135.

⁴³ Danielle Brown, “Moses' Intercession & God's Glory (Exodus 33:12-23),” E.K. Bailey Preaching Conference, Dallas, TX, July 8, 2025, video, <https://www.ekbpc.com/hub/events/471e602b-bc51-455f-bcb6-9386a5371910/sessions/decaa95a-eae6-431d-841d-d819d69b7aac?autoplay=true>.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 58:00.

⁴⁵ Frederick Haynes III, “Panel Discussion: Conversations on Liberation Then and Now,” E.K. Bailey Preaching Conference, Dallas, TX, July 9, 2025, video, 39:51, <https://www.ekbpc.com/hub/events/471e602b-bc51-455f-bcb6-9386a5371910/sessions/cfb959ce-457e-4054-ad82-dc4f6b8e5629?autoplay=true>.

In her sermon on Luke 10:25-37 entitled “The Good Neighbour,” Sarah Han reminds the congregation that “there are open wounds on our neighbors all around us.”⁴⁶ After a moving story of an unexpected encounter with a hurting man at a grocery store, Han invites the congregation in the closing moments into a space of prayers of need for Jesus, the true good neighbor. The emotion in the room is palpable. Han herself kneels on the stage, taking on a posture of prayer with her body and modeling humility praying: “Let’s say: God, I need you. God would you heal me? Would you pick me up off the road today?”⁴⁷ She ends by inviting people to stand and pray by name for their co-workers, family members, and friends who need Jesus.

Similarly, Priscilla Shirer is found kneeling at the end of her sermon “The View that Changes Everything” on Revelation 4, a fitting posture considering her sermon focus on the glory of Jesus on the throne.⁴⁸ As she reflects on the refrain of the four living creatures crying “holy, holy, holy”, she lowers herself to her knees in prayer and invites the congregation to join her in giving God praise and adoration.

Megan Fate Marshman, in her sermon “Trusting God: You’re Not Crazy,” leads the room into an activation moment in her conclusion.⁴⁹ She invites people to speak an encouraging word over their neighbor and pray for them. She first models how this might look and then releases them to do the same. Instead of simply praying over the room herself, she leads the people toward one another.

In her sermon “The Discipleship Secret,” Danielle Strickland leads the audience into a breathing prayer exercise at the conclusion of her sermon.⁵⁰ Strickland’s big idea is that there is only one thing necessary above all others to be a follower of Jesus, and that thing is love. In her breath prayer moment, she has the listeners contemplate the word “be” as they breathe in and contemplate the word “love” as they breathe out, making the phrase “be loved” integral to their breath.

At the Mockingbird Conference in New York City, Fleming Rutledge delivers a resurrection sermon.⁵¹ In her conclusion, she reflects on being in the latter years of her life and, with emotion and a slight tremor in her voice, shares a hymn.⁵² After a pause, she looks over the congregation and, with deep conviction, proclaims, “Dear people of God, Alleluia, the Lord is risen!” to which the audience responded, “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!” As applause begins for her

⁴⁶ Sarah Han, “The Good Neighbour,” New Hope Fellowship - Mississauga, April 29, 2024, YouTube video, 34:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4Clc_cRyyU.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37:25.

⁴⁸ Priscilla Shirer, “The View that Changes Everything,” Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, Dallas, TX, May 12, 2025, YouTube video, 42:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFhjcXOPrig>.

⁴⁹ Megan Fate Marshman, “Trusting God: You’re not Crazy,” Grace Family Church, Tampa, FL, May 4, 2025, YouTube video, 37:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6glwLiGaXrQ>.

⁵⁰ Danielle Strickland, “The Discipleship Secret,” Oral Roberts University Chapel, Tulsa, OK, February 21, 2020, YouTube video, 46:46, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtjLJm_YIjo.

⁵¹ Fleming Rutledge, “The Raising of the Crucified One,” Mockingbird Conference, New York City, April 28, 2017, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjUw-U7eaRc>.

⁵² Ibid., 39:00.

masterful sermon, Rutledge turns toward the cross, bows her head, and faces away from the audience. The clapping gradually becomes louder, shouts are heard, and soon the entire room is on their feet, but no longer applauding Rutledge. As though following her lead, they turn their adoration to the crucified one.

In these examples, women preachers use the conclusion to model embodied practices that engage the congregation. As Leonora Tubbs Tisdale notes in *How Women Transform Preaching*, women often redefine authority from a hierarchical to an invitational model.⁵³ By inviting postures such as kneeling or standing, they shift attention away from themselves, fostering communal participation and emphasizing connection with God and one another. These postures make the sermon's conclusion an active, participatory moment, reinforcing that the spiritual work of the congregation is shared rather than performed solely by the preacher.

Centering the Margins

Another note-worthy trend from these sample sermons is the way women bring those on the margins—both those in the text and in the room—to the center. Eunjoo Mary Kim argues that the experiences of women often share the common denominator of “marginality” due to being “victims to misogynist attitudes and patriarchal systems.”⁵⁴ Women preachers, in their own identification with marginality, are attentive to those on the margins within a given pericope and within a given room, not content to leave them in the forgotten places but eager to bring them into view. This homiletical virtue demonstrates God's heart for the outsiders and draws them in.

Turning again to Fomby's sermon, she draws attention to the way Pharaoh's “misogynistic short-sightedness” caused him to overlook the women.⁵⁵

He never believed the women to be a worthy opponent... But we don't have a book of Exodus to read from without 5 women: Miriam, Jochebed, Pharaoh's daughter, Shiphrah and Puah... [Moses] doesn't make it to the bush, if he doesn't make it out of the basket. He doesn't make it into the basket, if he's not first birthed through the womb... And he's not birthed... if not for the strategic resistance of the unarmed, uncommon, unlikely midwives... tell somebody: they never saw the women coming!... The very ones he overlooked are the very ones God strategically positioned.⁵⁶

Fomby centers not only the unnoticed women of the story but calls out by name the other women of Exodus. In so doing, she centers those in the room who have seen themselves on the margins. “When people look past you, let them! When they fail to recognize you, don't get mad—get strategic!”⁵⁷

⁵³ Tisdale, 64.

⁵⁴ Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 5.

⁵⁵ Fomby, 30:45.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 31:00.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 34:30.

In Pat Batten's aforementioned sermon on the Canaanite woman, she not only centers a socially marginalized character, she also identifies with her and invites her listeners to do the same. Batten replays the Canaanite woman's refrain "Lord have mercy" throughout the sermon in her own personal stories of pleading for mercy. She speaks from the perspective of a woman and a mother, identity markers she and the character share. In the end, the marginalized woman is the exemplar. She "sticks with Jesus" and demonstrates great faith.⁵⁸

Another example is seen in Jackie Hill Perry's sermon "Hagar: The Suffering Servant," where she centers Hagar, calling her "a woman who is treated as invisible, talked about and not talked to, called by her usefulness and never by her name."⁵⁹ Perry notes the deep human longing to be seen and shows how Hagar finds herself next to spring, which is the Hebrew word for "eye". "Next to the eye, this unseen woman is finally seen."⁶⁰

These examples demonstrate the ways women preachers center those on the margins, both those in the biblical text and those in the congregation. This homiletical virtue resembles the tendency of Jesus to engage the outsider and the marginalized during his earthly ministry.

Empathetic Sensitivity

Another homiletical virtue identified in the sample of sermons is an impulse toward empathetic sensitivity when approaching certain moments and topics. When Danielle Brown instructs the room to pray for one another, she instructs them of the importance of asking permission before physical contact—a sensitive pastoral caveat, particularly for women who experience unwanted touch at alarming rates.⁶¹ She is attentive to these concerns and is therefore sensitive to put guardrails in place, so that a moment of encouragement does not become a moment of harm for someone.

Similarly, Christine Redwood offers a pastoral trigger warning in her sermon on the tragic story of the Levite's concubine (another unnamed woman) in Judges 19. She lets the audience know the topic of sexual violence will be discussed today.⁶² She gives people permission to leave the room if they need to. "As we sit with this story today, we need to take care of ourselves. I won't be offended if you get up and duck out, and just take a moment."⁶³ Redwood also notes a phone number on the screen to call for help. It is this sensitivity that helps create clarity around where the sermon is headed and provides clear pathways for those for whom the topic can be personal and painful.

⁵⁸ Batten, 40:30.

⁵⁹ Jackie Hill Perry, "Hagar: The Suffering Servant (Genesis 16), November 28, 2023, YouTube video, 4:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn2nc78Dftg>. Note - this sermon appears to be preached to a largely female audience.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4:15.

⁶¹ See Center for Disease Control, "About Sexual Violence," January 23, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/sexual-violence/about/index.html>.

⁶² Christine Redwood, "Enough is Enough," Seaforth Baptist Church, March 21, 2021, audio, <https://www.seaforthbaps.org.au/sermons/enough-is-enough/>.

⁶³ Ibid., 7:40.

Lisa Harper, likewise, speaks from a place of empathetic sensitivity in addressing those who have felt forgotten or even have experienced abuse. In the moments of her sermon that require sensitivity in care, Harper comes out from around the pulpit as if to remove barriers and signal to the audience her sincerity and care.⁶⁴ She shares from the vulnerability of her own childhood story, speaking from a place of true knowing and empathy, reminding her listeners that it is ok to admit their need and pain before Christ.

CONCLUSION

In her 2021 EHS Paper “Lament and Hope of a Female Evangelical Preacher,” Arica Heald Demme highlights the meeting notes from the 1803 Methodist Church Annual Conference which decided at that time that women should not preach to mixed groups.⁶⁵ The conference justified this position first by noting widespread opposition, and second by claiming that “their preaching does not seem at all necessary.”⁶⁶ Over two hundred years later, this rationale persists today in some evangelical settings. Drawing on the analysis of dozens of sermons by women preachers and the observation of their distinctive homiletical contributions, this study affirms this paper’s central thesis: women preachers are not only permissible in the work of proclamation; they are necessary to the work.

Women bring unique gifts to the pulpit, but they also face distinct challenges. These include limited preaching opportunities, few female role models, institutional barriers, cultural expectations, pressure to represent all women, the emotional toll of scrutiny, and a lack of voice training tailored to women. While the EHS community has made significant strides in creating space for women—such as this year’s theme—more work remains.

Building on Demme’s 2021 recommendations, I appeal to the EHS community to make women a consistent feature of every conference, not a rare exception. This includes inviting women annually to give sermons, as in the example of Pat Batten in 2024, and inviting women as plenary speakers, as with this year’s Sarah Han. Seeing women in these roles affirms for other women who are unsure if they have a place in the EHS community that they do. This also alleviates the pressure for women attendees to serve as “trailblazers” which can be taxing and lead to unfair expectations placed upon them. Additionally, conference culture should promote respect and inclusivity, discouraging remarks that could be perceived as demeaning or sexist during sermons or sessions. For instance, at a past closing lunch, a male comedian repeatedly made jokes at the expense of women.⁶⁷ While humor is encouraged, moments like these highlight the need for greater sensitivity. Finally, EHS members can conduct research and projects in the area of gender and preaching, a still largely under-studied area, for the building up of the homiletical community.

⁶⁴ Harper, “The Power of Dependency,” 30:25.

⁶⁵ Arica Heald Demme, “Lament and Hope of a Female Evangelical Preacher,” EHS Conference Paper 2021, 36.

⁶⁶ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, The American Theological Library Association Monograph Series, 25 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 142, cited in Demme, 36.

⁶⁷ To the best of my recollection, this is in reference to the closing lunch at 2021 EHS Annual Conference at Baylor’s Truett Seminary in Waco, TX.