

*Andover Newton Theological School*  
CMPR 745 F  
IN SEASON AND OUT:  
PREACHING THE DIFFICULT SERMON

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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CLASS MEETINGS  
TUESDAYS, 9-11:50

Please note that the instructor regrets she will be out of town on Tuesday, Nov. 16. We will arrange a make-up session, probably during the scheduled exam period, either Dec. 15 or 16—to be negotiated.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Pastors are often faced with the challenge of preaching a “difficult” sermon—e.g., in the face of congregational conflict or personal tragedy, national emergency or turmoil, or complex ethical choices. There are also times when the difficulty pastors face is a dry well and a frantic search for fresh takes on traditional themes, such as at Easter or Christmas. This course will explore strategies and resources for preaching in such circumstances, as well as opportunities for crafting and delivering “difficult” sermons and receiving peer support and feedback. [Area of ministerial competence: Communicating]

REQUIRED READING Available in Andover Newton Bookstore

William H. Willimon, *Preaching about Conflict in the Local Church*  
Joseph R. Jeter Jr., *Crisis Preaching, Personal and Public*  
J. Philip Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love, Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World*  
Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*

RECOMMENDED READING Available in Andover Newton Bookstore

Joseph R. Jeter Jr and Ronald J. Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears, Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation*  
Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive, Lessons from Laity*

John S. McLure and Nancy Ramsay, *Telling the Truth: Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence*

NB: IF YOU HAVE NOT YET CONFRONTED THE ISSUES OF ANTI-JUDAISM AND SUPERSESSIONISM IN CHRISTIAN PREACHING, PLEASE READ ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Marilyn Salmon, *Preaching without Contempt: Overcoming Unintended Anti-Judaism*  
Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding*

Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*,

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Ministerial competence: Communicating

1. Preach an effective (biblically-based, theologically-sound, responsible, and well-constructed) sermon in the midst of national and congregational crisis and conflict, and/or in the face of personal or social ethical demands.
2. Identify and develop personal strategies for dealing with a variety of common obstacles to faithful preaching in the situations that are the focus of the course.
3. Identify and develop personal strategies for dealing with the demands and challenges of repetitive preaching: i. e., finding something to say at Christmas, Easter, and other traditional festivals.
4. Develop critical skills for listening to “difficult” sermons and for giving helpful feedback to fellow preachers.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. One in-class 10-minute “difficult” sermon on a topic to be assigned by the instructor. An accompanying explanation and reflection is also required (guidelines in appendix).
2. One turn as facilitator of class discussion on readings (see appendix for guidelines).
3. Weekly (except for the final 2 weeks) 500 word reflection paper (see appendix).
4. A full-length “difficult” sermon (18-20 minutes) on a topic of student’s choice, with accompanying materials, to be videotaped and discussed with instructor in a private session, to be arranged (see appendix for info).

5. Optional: Participation in a ‘Sermon Marathon’—an evening session during which those who wish may preach their final project sermon for classmates and others whom they wish to invite.

#### *Attendance*

More than 2 absences may jeopardize a Satisfactory Grade.

#### *Participation*

This class will operate “seminar style,” with students taking major responsibility for facilitating others’ learning. It is expected therefore that all will find a way to make contributions to the class in ways that are both congenial to their temperaments and challenging to their comfort zones. Unwillingness to find that way may jeopardize a Satisfactory Grade.

#### *Deadlines*

Students will try not to request incompletes and extensions unless prompted by real emergencies. The instructor will try not to cave...

#### *Honesty and care*

Faithfulness to the call to preach requires continual growth. Growth in the art and craft of preaching requires submitting oneself to the reflections and feedback of others. Submitting oneself in that way requires a desire to learn, and the exercise of humility. Those who offer reflections and feedback have a sacred duty to be honest and careful. The preaching/response cycle is an exercise in trust and in trustworthiness. Students will make every effort to be both trusting and trustworthy.

#### *Adherence to policies and community standards (e. g., inclusive language, plagiarism)*

Please read the Student Catalogue carefully (online at the ANTS website). Failure to follow the school’s policies and guidelines cannot be attributed to ignorance.

## GRADING

All assignments will be graded on a SAT/Fail basis unless the student requests a letter grade. The instructor is open to student feedback about evaluation.

## SEMESTER OUTLINE

### *September 14 Class 1*

#### *Introductory*

Intros, Syllabus review; Sign ups: weekly sermons, discussion leaders  
Exercises in definition: the “difficult” sermon; the sermon you dread  
Reading for Class 2—Willimon, *Local Church*, Chs. 1-4

### *September 21 Class 2*

#### *Preaching in the Midst of Congregational Conflict 1*

Sermon and Reflection

Student-Led Discussion: Readings  
Guest: My most difficult sermon  
Reading for Class 3: Willimon, *Local Church*, Chs. 5-7

*September 28 Class 3*  
*Preaching in the Midst of Congregational Conflict 2*  
Sermon and Reflection  
Student-Led Discussion: Readings  
Guest: My most difficult sermon  
Reading for Class 4: Jeter, *Crisis*, Chs. 1-4

*October 5 No Class/Community Day*

*October 12 Class 4*  
*Preaching in the Face of Public/National Crisis 1*  
Sermon and Reflection  
Student-Led Discussion: Readings  
Discussion and analysis: Sermons from the Sunday after 9/11  
Reading for Class 5: Jeter, *Crisis*, Chs. 5-7, and sermon samples

*October 19 Class 5*  
*Preaching in the Face of Public/National Crisis 2*  
Sermon and Reflection  
Student-Led Discussion: Readings  
Discussion and analysis: Sermons after Hurricane Katrina  
Reading for Class 6: Readings to be assigned

*October 26 Class 6*  
*Preaching in the Face of Personal Crisis 1*  
Sermon and Reflection  
Student-Led Discussion: Readings  
Guest: My most difficult sermon  
Reading for Class 7: Readings to be assigned

*November 2 Class 7*  
*Preaching in Face of Personal Crisis 2*  
Sermon and Reflection  
Student-Led Discussion: Readings  
Guest: My most difficult sermon  
Reading for Class 8: Wogaman, *Truth in Love*, Chs. 1-7

*November 9 Class 8*  
*Preaching Prophetically 1*  
Sermon and Reflection  
Student-Led Discussion: Readings  
Presentation: Preaching the Election Sermon

Reading for Class 9: Wogaman, *Truth in Love*, Chs. 8-10, and sermon samples; Tisdale, *Pastoral Approach*, Chs. to be announced

*November 16 No Class/Instructor Away*

*November 23 No Class/Fall Break*

*November 30 Class 9*

*Preaching Prophetically 2*

Sermon and Reflection

Student-Led Discussion: Readings

Guest: Preaching the Equal Marriage Sermon

Reading for Class 10: Tisdale, *Pastoral Approach*, Chs. to be announced

*December 7 Class 10*

*Preaching Prophetically 3*

Sermon and Reflection

Student-Led Discussion: Readings

Discussion and analysis: From the Pulpit: The Arizona Immigration Law

Assignment for Class 11: Bring tips for “When the Well Runs Dry”

*December 14 Class 11*

*When the Well Runs Dry*

Sermons and Reflection

Panel: Sharing Tips on Courage, Perseverance, and Imagination

Assignment for Class 12: Prepare a personal reflection of 2-3 minutes on insights and challenges from the course, and a written list of 3-5 specific things you learned that will have impact on your practice as a preacher. You will share the insight orally, and hand in the list.

*December 15 or 16 Class 12 Conclusions*

Sermons and Reflection

Summing Up, Sharing Insights, Learning; Thinking about Next Steps

#### APPENDIX: *Assignment Guidelines*

##### **In-class 10-minute sermon**

A topic will be assigned to you by the instructor, along with a description of the context in which you will be preaching.

You will choose scripture texts(s) in which to ground your message.

At the time you preach your sermon in class, you will submit an accompanying document of no more than 3 pages (750 words) in which you briefly describe the process you engaged to prepare the sermon:

- ❖ your “reading” of the situation and of the congregation
- ❖ why you chose the texts you are commenting on
- ❖ what obstacles you ran into and had to overcome—and how you overcame them
- ❖ other matters which you brought to bear on sermon preparation.

If you use a full sermon text, an outline, or notes for delivery, you will submit them as well.

### **Facilitation of Class Discussion**

Each student will sign up to be responsible for preparing and facilitating one 40-minute class session of analysis and discussion of the week’s assigned textbook readings.

You may organize this session in any way you choose, as long as it helps all students engage the assignment in a critical way, and allows for their questions, insights and comments to get airtime.

For example, you might prepare discussion questions to hand out the previous week, or split the group into smaller sections to generate questions and insights to bring back to the whole group, or even give a quiz (!) and spend the remainder of the time discussing the answers...

Imagination is encouraged, but the aim is to help the students digest, sift through, learn something from, quarrel with, be helped by the ideas of the authors we are reading.

### **Weekly reflection papers**

You will submit a 2-page (500 words max.) paper every week, the first in week 2 and the last in week 10.

**NB: You do not have to write and submit a paper the week you are preaching in class, or the week you are facilitating the group discussion of the weekly reading assignment. This means each student will hand in a total of 7 papers.**

The weekly paper is meant to be a chance for you to reflect freely on what you are learning each week from your reading, from class discussions, from guests’ comments, presentations.

Focus on one or two things that have prompted you to think more deeply about your call to preach, your preaching habits, your confidence or skill, your doubts and fears.

Ideally your reflections should be related to one or more of the objectives of the course listed above in this syllabus: what am I learning this week about preaching “in season and out” that is helping me inch along towards reaching those goals?

**Final full-length sermon**

Each student will prepare and preach a 18-22 minute sermon on a “difficult” topic of his or her choice.

The sermon must be videotaped (CD/DVD).

The student will arrange to meet with the instructor to view and discuss the sermon.

The sermon may be prepared, preached and discussed at any time between the 8<sup>th</sup> week of the semester and the end of exam period, December 17.

Each student will also submit a 4-6 page paper (1000-1500 words) describing

- ❖ the context of the sermon—the event, crisis, ethical demand, national issue, etc. that prompted the sermon
- ❖ the context of the congregation
- ❖ the decision to preach
- ❖ the choice of scripture text(s)
- ❖ the process of preparing/writing: form, tone, problems and obstacles, etc.
- ❖ any other pertinent information that helps set the sermon in context

Optional: Students who wish to preach their sermons for a “congregation” of classmates and friends may sign up for a Preaching Marathon, date and time TBA.